

The Call to the Light

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Summary: Ben Solo, formerly Kylo Ren, and Rey travel through space to Jakku, a month's journey. They continue to improve each other's training, but under the surface their desire for each other grows. Oh, and they prepare to kill Snoke. Sequel to "I Need A Teacher." The grandest of Reylo burns

1. Chapter 1

The Call to the Light

Chapter 1

"Aren't you a bit boyish-looking for a whore?"

Rey is seventeen (she thinks) and standing in a tent outside Niima Outpost. Unlike every other day of her existence, digging through dirty old ships and crawling into her hovel to eat and sleep, she's taken care of her appearance tonight. She may not be dressed in finer clothes with any color besides that of the sand, and there probably is still sand left in the curves and crevices along her skin. But what she lacks in finer wares and fine-smelling cleanliness, she owns in her unabashedly youthful appearance. Her face has fine lines and, if she would just stop scowling for thirty seconds, there'd be a softness about her.

Staring at the man sprawled in a chair, scruffier than herself, like he was born from it, Rey thinks of what exactly to say. She's shed some outer layers of her only outfit. The outer sash she's draped and wrapped over her chest is gone, to show the curves of her breasts, as are the wraps around her arms. The skin there, as well as from her collarbone, gleams (she hopes) from the lamplight.

Rey has come up with nothing of any value for three days. She's starving and was forced to steal water for the first time since her adolescence, when she didn't know any better. They had branded her

for that on her arm. For doing it the second time, fate hadn't given her a break. She got caught " by this broken-nosed, glassy-eyed grub " and now "

and now. Now she's paying the price.

Squaring her shoulders, reminding the humanoid fella that she could hurt him again, Rey replied coolly, "Don't see you've got anything better around here."

"Says you," he drawls like they're hovel-mates. "I've had my nose halfway up a Trillian's snatch a few hours ago. She, at least had some nice meat on her bones."

"She was probably saggy and had you do all the work."

The humanoid actually cracks a smile. The sound in his mouth is sticky and warm, almost like old oil. It's a low laughter, something Rey hasn't heard for so long that she compares it to a predator's purr.

It's absurd. All of it. She's seen how womenfolk around here are treated " if they don't do anything of value, if they look a little too pretty, if they even look _not too ugly, _or if they're generally in the wrong place. She's seen one poor alien tied outside a shop, naked from the waist down and sitting on some rug for some passerby to rut with, if he bargained the right price.

It chilled Rey when she first saw it, knowing what exactly that female's fate entailed. It had made more sense from that day forward to bind her breasts a little tighter and hide her hair until she looked sexless and plain.

People on Jakku were cruel. Males were usually the crueler of the sexes. Unkar Plutt was actually decent, but that was because he could afford to be. Rey's lucky she hasn't been completely raped or mutilated just by looking at them funny.

This man, though.

Rey shifted uncontrollably at his lingering stare. Though his face was more tanned than hers, with brown-black hair (like old oil again) and indecipherable lines along his face that could be scars or wrinkles, he had blue eyes. Blue eyes, in a human, never mind any other alien she'd seen before. Rey had seen in a reflective surface that hers were brown. Shocker. _His_ were brighter than the sky.

If Rey hadn't resented him for catching her at their water trough, she'd stare at them all day.

But it's a ridiculous thought and she's reminded of how his arm seized her entire person in a vice, and threw her into his tent to size her up. He could've dunked her head in the trough to drown her like last time years ago. He could have had her, legs spread and privates bruised. and that had almost happened before.

No, he'd just shrugged, given her a slap, and kicked her out the doorway with a brusque "on your way."

Maybe he wouldn't pay for shit for her. It's true; she's awfully

bony. She's more on the frail than lean side this season, and she's tired from the walk up here.

"Look, you wanna do this or not?"

The blue-eyed fella leans over for his cup and ignores her for a minute.

"Let's not rush things, luv," he muses. And that's the other thing â€" he's got the same accent as hers, a strange, glinted lilt that makes everything sound less harsh, guttural. "You haven't even mentioned your price."

[illegible]

"Rey. Wake up. We're about to drop hyperspace."

On the other side of the duel cockpit, Ben Solo, once the proud and fearsome beast Kylo Ren, speaks to Rey. They spent the last 16 hours flying through the black.

Rey feels a trace of drool from her mouth and is thankful the seats face away from each other.

"Yeah, all right," she yawns. "Kelado, right?"

"I'm searching for a place to land now. Based on " " " "

"Hang on, I got it." Rey fumbles for a datapad near her where she stored coordinates. Leaning the pad behind her for him, she says, "Plug these in. I know the place, we'll go unnoticed here."

Ignoring how odd he sounded taking orders or asking questions, Rey waits for the man to grab the datapad and punch in the numbers.

They sail into the atmosphere and wait for the rocky red terrain to swallow them. Globelike, catacomb structures hang from jagged edges. Like a soothing reprieve, the chill from space breaks finally. Rey shivers in shock as the warmth from the very thermal planet seeps into their little fighter.

Though it's against her intention, Ben feels Rey's sudden comfort like a wave. He has to hold in his breath, but he feels himself go slack from the unexpected pleasure.

Shaking his head, Ben severs the flood of sensation and focuses on the terrain that soars past them.

"You haven't been here before," he reminds his younger companion.

"No," says Rey, "But there are people who can help us trade in this fighter for something more comfortable."

She doesn't say more than that. The space in their cockpit is too small for an escape from his still-existent temper. If he knew the real reason why they came to Kelado, he'd flip.

Deftly, Rey directs their little craft far from the amber-lit city.

The clouds hang low and offer some cover as they get closer to their location. She switches a few controls and they slow.

"Dampen the frequencies, Ben. I'll find my way around."

Behind her, Ben sniffs and does as she suggests. They're still far away from the attention of the First Order, or even the Resistance. This is still technically the Outer Rim, but they have to try their best and remain discrete. The people they're about to shack up with don't want the kind of attention a Jedi apprentice and a defected Knight of Ren attract.

"Can you open up a channel," Rey says as she swings through the navy clouds, feeling for any obstacles through the Force.

Ben flicks a switch from overhead. "Careful, there's a â€" "

"I see it," she cuts in as she steers away from a weather radar.

"Channel's open," he tells her.

Rey brightens on instinct. "Hey, strangers, care to let a group of tired pilgrims in for the night?"

She's changed her accent to basic, just like Ben's, for the transmission. He turns in her direction quizzically. Before he can ask, the transmission buzzes. "Hey, there, pilgrim! Come on out back and we'll see what we can do!"

The voice is male, older but very homely.

"I'm trying to find your house, but it's too dark to tell," Rey adds in a strangely lax, girlish tone.

"We'll leave the front light on for you, you can't miss us."

Five minutes later Rey is docking the fighter deep within one side of the canyon. It juts out past the gap until it overlooks a flat plane of hard ground, not quite like a desert.

This is the home of Boshtar Webb, a retired podrace manufacturer and occasional smuggler. Rey had saved his son a few months ago when the First Order bombed the shite out of a Resistance hideout in some village on Vardis VI. Now returning the favor, the Webbs have extended an invitation for Rey, whenever she needed it.

The only problem is that they don't know Rey is a Jedi.

2. Chapter 2

The Call to the Light

Chapter 2

"Ben."

The man behind Rey sometimes tries very hard to deserve that name. The connection to it, to be honest, sometimes isn't there

anymore.

"They don't know who I am, exactly," she says to the space between his headrest and the window. "I mean, I will, but I just thought"

"All right," he concludes. Ben has already shed his outer robes and belt so that he can pass off as normal in his simple shirt, pants and boots. No one knows what Kylo Ren looks like thanks to the masked helmet, so despite the nakedness he feels at his exposed face, they've earned enough discretion.

Then again, Snoke could have broadcast Ben's face to every First Order channel to hunt them down.

They climb out of the cockpit with protesting muscles. The hanger space is carved out of the rock, and a metal door whines open to reveal a bearded and balding white-haired alien. His round shape is covered by deep purple robes. He's a Nakorkian, with slits for nostrils on his forehead, two pairs of inky black eyes and two pairs of spindly arms.

Boshtar Webb extends all four of them. "Welcome, welcome! Bria Kellig, in my humble abode!"

Bria. Bria Kellig. Ben moves his lips as small as he can (he knows how long his mouth is, thank you) to remember this name. But what's his?

Benji, Rey quickly supplies like a bell in his head. _Pick whatever last name you want, I'll pretend I don't know it._

Why are we here?" Ben begins, but Rey is halfway over to their kind-looking, clueless host.

"Mister Webb, hi," she continues in her fake, cheery, un-Coruscanti accent. It's startling how quickly she's dropped it. "It's so nice to finally meet you!"

The two embrace as if they have been neighbors for years and are only reuniting. Ben hangs back awkwardly, feeling very out of place. They hadn't discussed the details in coming to this location. Leaving the planet they'd hidden and recovered on after Uncle Luke's death had been, unexpectedly, difficult. As one of the more colorful pilots had said before the whole group departed into two parties, the honeymoon was over. The rest of the Resistance, including Ben's mother Leia Organa, and Rey's close friend Finn, were reuniting with the command.

Getting around was strictly Rey's control. Ben could not gain help from any First Order connection, and certainly none of his former Ren comrades would hide them. He knew he would begin to feel distinctly helpless while the girl organized their trek across the galaxy using all of her connections and skills.

"Ah," said the portly alien, pulling away from the embrace and looking intently at Ben. "And you've brought a young man with you. What's your name, my boy?"

Boy. He hasn't been called that by anyone, ever. Not even by Snoke,

and no one presumed to talk down to the son of Leia Organa Solo so cheaply.

"Benji. Benji Hodar." He strides over confidently and offers his hand.

"Very good, son. Come on in. I've got supper waiting for you. I hope you like thermal-raised succulents. My daughter's cooked them herself."

The alien rambled on as he led them inside. The planet boasted so much geothermal energy that Ben could feel it, almost hear it like a radio. Rey glanced back at him with a spare, _everything all right?_ look, which Ben was quick to wave off.

They would eat, rest, then be off again for another flight.

Sss

"My son will be disappointed, you know."

They're halfway through dinner arranged by Boshtar's unmarried daughter, who's left them to eat alone in another private room. Rey brings her intrigued gaze from the private room to the alien.

"Why's that? Oh, wait, don't â€" "

"Well, he's talked his mouth over being rescued by some darling humanoid in some First Order officer's uniform, only to find out she's a spy on Krakkauer! Then," he adds jovially. "Then she calls ahead while he's off on some mission, and comes with an equally charming humanoid â€" " he lingers while gesticulating to Ben, who predictably fidgets (even if Rey's the only one who can see it).

"Oh, um," she tries to rescue the two of them. "Well, we're not, you know â€" "

"I'm sure it's only a matter of time before she slips in bed with me, Mister Webb," Ben interrupts.

Rey's jaw slacks at the comment while the Makorkian drops his fork, which clatters enormously in the intimate space.

"Bah! Well €" Hahaha! Oh, Benji, you're a doll, aren't you something. Well," he says, dabbing his four eyes with a napkin. "Oh, dear, you are smooth. We all need to be careful from you."

Hm, it does feel too intimate suddenly. "Benji" casts a wary eye over to his traveling companion, then pushes his chair out.

Rey watches him remove something from his lap " the napkin. Oh. Right. That's where it's supposed to go. She'd pushed it away from her plate and hadn't touched it, choosing to lick from her fingers once in a while. Kriffin' idiot. And him, the bloody cultured prince.

"It's been a long night. I should turn in. Thank you, Mr. Webb," Ben says with the slightest nod in his head like it was a bow. "For your

hospitality."

Rey blinks at the outright charm coming from the man who's imprisoned, attacked and mentally tortured her. His raven hair shrouds the outline of his face, and in this informal dining space he commands the entire room.

The Makorkian appears more taken with him. "Oh, Benji, my boy," he replies gently. "You are too kind. Anything to stick it to the First Order, even if it means offering a bed. Or two."

Next to him, Rey watches Ben's face for a flush. He retreats with another nod in time and wishes them goodnight.

The father of the foot soldier Rey had rescued on Krakkauer unashamedly watches her companion's retreating form. "Is heâ€¦you know, yours?"

Swallowing carefully at another bite of food, Rey wonders if they should start posing as brother and sister instead.

"Um. Not â€" no," she settles. "We're â€" " kriff, she almost dropped her accent. She almost forgot she used it around Boshtar's son, Horner, when she got the codes to the First Order's detention facilities and released Resistance fighters and miners from the nearby village. "I'd rather not say."

"Ah, of course." Boshtar leans out and signals for his daughter to clean up. "Well, if you wanted to take a look before heading to bed, it's down below."

Rey thinks about this as she awkwardly watches the Makorkian girl pick up plates. She gently hands the four-armed girl her own, with the utensils neatly on top. "Sure. I'll want to get started on getting it prepped for tomorrow."

They head down one level into a second hanger bay, where Boshtar's secret wares lie in wait like a treasure room. Rey doesn't notice the three-meter tall green marble statue of some nude woman, or the tank filled with hundreds of swimming gold-producing jellyfish. There are two other ships in the hanger, but the Millennium Falcon attracts her sole attention.

Sighing heavily, cleanly, like the release of finally coming home, Rey whispers, "Hey, big girl. I missed you."

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Ben finds a change of clothes waiting for him on the sleep-couch. They're simple, a pair of charcoal gray breeches and a dark blue-gray shirt long enough to tuck in. He's worn black for so long he looks doubtfully at the innocent favors. Next to them, though, is a warm layered waistcoat in the preferred color.

He's so tired he could collapse in the bed he knows will not be long enough for his frame. He'll shower in the morning. There's another cot next to his. It made Ben hesitate when he first walked in the spare room. He'd rather suffer another night with salt-stained, irritable skin and hair than become more vulnerable around her,

should she come in while he's in the 'fresher.

He takes off his boots and stretches. Each move feels luxurious for his grand, restless form. He yawns and pulls in a greedy amount of air. The warmth in the atmosphere is such a contrast from the ocean planet he'd been rescued to, and Starkiller before that.

By the time he feels ready to sleep, he's spent 30 minutes in a handstand with all the furniture levitating in the air. He'd much prefer to run, or practice his combat, or something.

Rey's nearby, but he suspects she's enjoying her personal space as much as he is.

Removing his shirt, he traces his fingers along the scarred cuts he's inflicted himself. The need for them is less desirable. He thinks he's stable, better off now. He'll certainly have more trouble making more, if he needs it, being so close to her.

Sss

The whole night, Rey goes through the Falcon: sorting through the controls, the hyper compressors, combing over the hull with a welding tool for any blaster holes she may have missed. She's slept for maybe ten minutes every hour on the compact flight, and with a warm, full meal in her belly she's alive with activity. Even the bunk room she's made her own, Spartan as it is, could use a little cleaning up.

Ignoring the reaction Ben Solo may give tomorrow, she decides to make the interior more Jedi-friendly: the main lounge area has been cleared of spare tools, water tanks and generators so that if they decide to practice combat, they'll have room. There's another spare bunk room Ben can claim for himself. For safety's sake, Rey will leave Chewie's bunk closed off.

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In the morning Boshtar prematurely leads Ben out to where Rey's packing some extra rations on board. She feels a little uncomfortable taking so much from this man. All she's done is unlock a silly door, and he's stored a well-recognized (to certain circles) ship for her.

When she sees his tall form, made more lanky and youthful in his new clothes, she stops in her tracks. He freezes, too, eyes suddenly tight with recognition.

Rey puts down some box and goes over to him. "It's all ready for â€"

"No. No, absolutely not."

Rey's anticipated this and pushes away the impatience. "Why not."

"Don't be ignorant, Rey, it just makes you look unashamedly stupid."
His voice is tainted with betrayal.

Rey's jaw drops at the sudden barb. Is he serious? Rey may have anticipated this reaction from him — it's his father's ship. He probably left his toys in here and even learned how to walk through the halls.

And isn't that ridiculous: a waddling, fleshy baby Ben giggling and gurgling while a younger Han lazily trails after him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he demands. "We were in a ship for almost a day and you never mentioned why we came here in the first place."

"Probably because of how you'd react," she shrugged, suddenly not caring at all for his pissy mood.

Ben scowls, tightening his fists. "I'd rather waste away in the fighter. You can go in that death trap if you want, but I'm not wasting my time trying to — please you."

"I'm not —" _what_ - ?!"

"Are you planning for me to call this place home again?" he interrupts icily.

"Get over yourself, it's a bloody ship." She stomps away and up the ramp, but then turns around suddenly. "You're being a baby! Would you rather Chewbacca be here, and not me? I'm not going anywhere with you without getting to use a refresher as much as I damn want to. And you and I need enough space to ourselves. AND we don't have enough money to get another."

Okay, that's a pointless argument. They're Jedi, they could easily steal one.

Too bad, though; she's already retreated back into the hall. But damnit, she's already forgotten what she was doing.

"And one more thing!" she says with her finger pointed out. The last of it, though, dies on her lips.

Ben's cast a hesitant eye upon the ship. He looks dreadful, like the ghost of Han Solo will come out to greet him. Rey knows enough of ghosts — she's met Ben's grandfather, Anakin Skywalker. Though Han Solo cannot be a spirit of the Force, she should have been less bullish to Ben about boarding his father's prized vessel.

She sighs and tries again in a softened voice. "It's just a ship."

Ben doesn't appear to hear her. His Adam's apple bobs in nervous defiance.

"I'm leaving in an hour." She stomps back down because she realizes she's not done with him. And she left her bags beside him. "You can come and take my bunk and pretend you're not here as you meditate your head off."

Leaving him in a huff, Rey strides back in and lets the familiar damp, metallic smell calm her. It's her home, if he still refuses it. She misses it badly, and with Finn not here —

No Finn, or Poe. No Jess. Not even Leia, Chewbacca, BB-8. Luke. Anakin. Just him.

A chuckle rises out of her. He can't be half as decent a pilot as her. He's fought so hard from such an early age to avoid his father's legacy, from charm to flying a ship, that he probably couldn't last two days in the fighter on his own. Plus, when he was Kylo Ren, she seriously doubted he was piloting that sleek-looking thing, the _Finalizer_, all on his own. Probably had some Stormtrooper do it.

When she does start the engines, and the second hanger bay doors open to reveal the clear daylight, she senses his somber, dense energy from down the hall.

Strapped in the pilot's seat, she turns to see him carry a bag of new personal items. He stares at her with a quiet resolve that says, _please shut up and let it go._

The fearsome Kylo Ren. Willing a girl three-quarters his size and strength to not prick his pride.

"'Fresher's ready, if you want to use it," she offers flatly. "The second room's yours if you want it."

Turning back to the window, Rey eases the thrusters and guides the _Falcon_ out to the air. She senses the thanks in her head as he retreats.

3. Chapter 3

The Call to the Light

Chapter 3

It's all dark until he sees a fire in the sand, at night. There are people in several circles around it, genuflecting and humming. There's a certain scent in the air, a sharp coolness that's almost frosty, mixing with the remnants of scintillating heat from hours ago.

Ben's been here before. He just knows it, but like an itch he can't discern its origin.

He looks around. He feels weighed down from something. When he walks, his boots and clothes are crisp, his outer robe free from the salty stench from the sea planet, Sher-hadda (whatever Rey had named it).

When he looks outward, his gloved hand is suddenly seized by something.

On the ground is an alien with a large narrow head. He lows pitifully. Under the arm that's grabbed him is a large, cauterized blaster wound.

Come back, he suddenly understands the alien say.

Ben shakes his head. Something else pulls at his robes.

He doesn't exactly scream, but he flinches at the sight of a white-haired old man; Lor San Tekka, the man he had cut down with his own cross-guard saber.

"Come back, Ben," he says. Deep red, dark as mud, shines from his neck and head.

He's breathing heavily through his nostrils, unable to project his fear. His own hot breath surrounds him in a claustrophobic manner.

His mask. Force alive, he's wearing his mask.

He is Kylo Ren again.

No! he feels himself say, and he jerks about to shove the damned thing _off_ his head.

It won't come off.

"No," he murmurs.

Something vibrates in his head, swimming like a sickness underneath.

Come back, the voice, female and despondent, sobs. _Please come back!_

Ben is blind with panic. He cannot sense anything beyond that claxon cry in his head. It's so strong—it is a whisper from a galaxy away.

Unconscionably he is bent on the floor, where fallen, seared corpses of the dead, all over the sand, rush at him. All he wants is to claw out the voice wrapped in his skull.

Kylo. Kylo Ren.

This time, another voice emerges, male and deep, birthed from a cavern, from embers.

He knows this voice from the holovids. It rattles his bones. He looks up, his arms held back by those he had (ordered) killed.

The shape is nothing more than a shroud at first, but soon enough Darth Vader's unforgettable face hovers like a god over Ben.

Years ago this would have been Ben Solo's calling. Now, the fear and regret bulk in his veins until he can choke.

_Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck—! _

Through the receptor in his helmet, his desperation is projected. "That's not me anymore."

"Isn't it?" Vader's imperious timbre replies, almost cocking his head.

Ben already knows what is coming next. He deserves it. He doesn't even look away.

It's what he's wanted, craved. His side, and all the other scars he's given himself to solidify his wickedness, freeze and burn at the furious red ray of saber light.

He bares his neck for the awaiting killing blow.

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Ben realizes he is asleep when he first hears the alarm.

He's heard it before when he had snuck onto the _Falcon_ and his father had piloted it in a half-assed escape. The hull had been hit, or something. It shook him more than it should have, making him thinkâ€|

The panic coming from the only other person on board pierces his attention.

Rey. _Rey_!

He throws himself out of bed and barrels down the hall.

"What is it!" he bellows.

"We're being followed!" she shouts back, her tied hair moving erratically as she seizes the controls. "I didn't see them, I never sensed them!"

The other Ren Knights, Ben hurriedly realizes as he absorbs their positions. Three First Order cruiser vessels, flanked by a dozen TIE fighters. The nearest system isn't for a few days â€" how did these ships just manage to catch up to them without either Jedi sensing them?!

"I'm at the gunner," he shouts back as he runs to the little alcove down below.

What an imbecile.

Ben skids to a halt, unable to believeâ€|.

It's Snoke.

How - ?!

Turn around and watch.

Ben cannot rush back. Honest, genuine fear, deeper than bones and marrow, stamps through him. He measures every step as miles back to the cockpit.

Rey will be all right. Rey will be alive.

Rey is suspended a few inches above the ground, still, almost angelic in the way she looks asleep.

Ben is rigid. He does not dare blink, move, breathe. If he does " she " can't " CAN'T "

SNAP .

Ben hears it. He hears it all the way into his heart, a drum, an explosion of a planet, a burst of Starkiller's power, but he cannot believe it.

Her neck is bent and it lolls carelessly. Forcing back a wave of bile, Ben knows nothing else to do.

Her neck has snapped. He's heard it. It happened so fast, but he's seen it. She's -

"Nnnnnnooo," he whimpers. It is so pitiful and disgusting a sound he doesn't recognize it as his own. Knees weaken and sink to the floor. Rey's body â€" so slight, so young and strong â€" hovers still. Waiting.

It is too cruel. She's dead and he's too faint to touch her, to bring her down from Snoke's phantom hold and embrace her out of failure.

"Rrrr" he can't. His voice is gone. Bubbles of sobs burst through, making his ribcage heave uncontrollably. He shivers. "R-rey!"

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All of a sudden his face is hot and wet. He is alone in the spare room, blankets clumsily around his legs, his back and rear end aching from the thin mattress on the metal floor. Stumbling to his feet, Ben gasps, groaning, to exorcise the horrible dream. He digs his palms into his eyes, trying to just calm down. He feels so sick he wants to throw up his heart.

_Is she alive. _

He must go to her. It's not enough that the Force is telling him she's in the _Falcon_ breathing in a room next to his. He has to know â€" that she's all right. He has to _see_.

Her presence pools from the door. He paws at it worriedly, feeling for the little switch that will make it ascend quieter than with the regular switch.

He watches the metal sheet fly up and steps in, carefully, covering his presence with mental shields. It takes a second to see how the room is arranged, but then he finds her " on the cot, legs stretched out under a thin blanket, stomach down, arms and head cradling a ratty pillow.

Her hair's down. It spills all over her head until all he can see, even in the dark, is her pert nose and half of her cheek.

Sagging in relief, something inside him lurches. She looks so young. It's startling. He's older than her by almost ten years. Oftentimes she's the one with a heavy, intense maturity that it depresses, confuses and offends him. But looking at her, this

stubbornly hopeful, bullish girl-woman, makes him want to keep her this way forever: shuffling in her sleep like a careless teenager, and this is their home on some planet.

Ben hasn't sensed Snoke since that secret planet. He has known since his escape that his old master could find him anywhere if he does not carefully cover his Force-signature. The focus on Rey in his cast-off visions, however, accurately weaken him.

If Rey is not in this universe with him he has no one. Not even his mother. He has no reason to live, no reason to call himself Jedi.

He takes a brief look at the room. Remembering that her last long-term shelter was a trashed-out AT-AT walker, he realizes that making a space her own really means something. The personal furnishings besides the cot, shelf and work table include a glittering blue water lamp, like her lightsaber, and a purple meditation rug.

Feeling like a sneak all of a sudden, Ben casts one guilty look back at Rey, pausing to make sure her form rises up and down in a healthy, deep breath, then closes the door behind him.

Feeling utterly alone, fighting off a terrible desire to wake her up and force her to keep him company, like he is a child all over again, Ben returns to his room and tries to find some peace.

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"We haven't talked about where we should go yet."

Rey looks up from her bowl of juga oats and freeze-dried berries. For the whole morning, Ben hadn't acknowledged her presence beyond a curt nod in her direction. Through his messier shield of hair, his face was pale and wrecked. She reasoned, feeling awkward, that he was still upset with her for lying about the _Falcon_.

He's killed people. He's killed kids, probably. Stop worrying about his feelings.

He had sat down next to her, finally, after an entire minute of standing around awkwardly in the main cabin.

"I guess not," she replies with a shrug. "I wasn't sure if we were supposed to hide and do more Jedi training, or I dunno, help out the Resistance somehow."

Ben looks up from his knotted hands. "Help out?"

Her shrug is even more pronounced. "Yeah. I mean. Blow up some communication tower. Steal some supplies. Act like spice pirates and raise all hell in the name of freedom, justice and the republic." She says this in the hope that he will just smile a little bit.

Ben sniffs in mild acknowledgment and looks around the cabin. "That's quite an ambitious plan for a two-person crew."

"Come on," she snorts as she scrapes the last of her breakfast. She

counts three berries left. "We're aboard the _Millenium Falcon_. I'll be Chewbacca" I probably shave as often as he does, between the two of us."

When she sneaks a look at him, she sees his tongue hooked over one of his teeth, as if he is holding himself from openly laughing.

Why is she trying so hard to make him laugh? She senses he's sluggish. He's not exactly closed himself off with mental shields, which is normally an obvious sign that something's wrong, but his mood is very murky. More than usual.

She'll get nothing from him if she asks if he's all right. "What was your plan?"

Ben waits, as if she will scold his proposal. "I think we should go to Jakku."

Those three still-frozen berries are halfway in her mouth when she hears that word. She forgets that the spoon lingers near her face when she stares him down. "Whyyyy?"

It's more suspicion than chiding, but still, Ben almost folds in on himself.

"I" he shakes his head, black hair curtaining his half-scarred face. "It's a complicated reason."

"Complicated, really?" she goads.

Ben's fingers curl into his fists, awaiting a fight. "I'm - ! I'm not sure you would understand."

"It was my home for fifteen years. I would understand something. Come on," Rey demands, snapping to her feet as he prepares to turn away. "What is it?"

He looks more like an actor than a reformed Jedi in his civilian clothes, the way he holds himself in imperious restraint.

"I saw something. It was a dream," he finishes lamely.

"There are plenty of desert planets out here. You sure it's that one?"

"I saw the people I killed. There was a village. And a man I knew who he was. He knew my family. I killed him" I cut him down. It's Jakku," he affirms.

Rey senses the plea behind his firm tone and attempts to reason, "Jakku is about a month away from here. We're practically outside the Outer Rim right now."

"Well, then, it gives us plenty of time to train, doesn't it?" he says with fake confidence.

Rey tilts her head. "Ben. Why do we have to go back?"

"I'm not sure." He sounds so honest that maybe something's wrong. Rey knows better than to push. She's afraid to ask what exactly he saw,

Rancor-slayer and all around badass, battles don't have to end with lost limbs._

_She's been good and patient. Extremely patient. She's kept her brain shut about wanting to show him just what she can do to protect herself. She's dealing with a real Jedi here. Her victory over that prick Kylo Ren may have gained a wave of confidence for the Resistance, but afterâ€|after Luke mournfully told her of the violence resting in her past, she's spent more time on this island questioning whether she deserves her role as a Jedi trainee.

_

_Fighting used to be a personal win if she wasn't robbed or beaten, back on Jakku. After the smiles and unexpected praises on the Resistance base, it became an unexpected source of approval, of making friends. _

It's strange how in the past few weeks she's understood how fighting can be a bad thing, something to avoid at many costs.

Clash! Rey's holding back a powerful overhead assault from Luke, holding her blade at a horizontal parry. His gray, lined face bores into hers.

"_Concentrate on the moment," he near-growls, making Rey think that he's equally tired._

She huffs, blowing a strand of hair from her face. "When do we stop?"

"_When one of us says 'stop.'" Luke's eyes are impossibly blue, reminding her of someone she once knew, but with less fuzzy eyebrows._

Rey senses it, actually senses it with the Force ("I did it!" she'll say later) the second Luke tries to swipe her feet with his own leg. She steps around until she's almost behind him, legs locked around each other.

Their sabers get tangled and they have to spin away. Rey's got an opening. Now Skywalker is the one closing on the cliff. Rey advances, saber at a resting attack formation.

_Luke watches her and rolls the saber in tight pensiveness. A few feet apart, they gather their breaths for a short reprieve. _

It's too obvious of a defensive position. Luke's a powerful master and Rey's always fought with desperation, never cleverness.

_The Force tingles around her, wanting to be tapped. In the rush of the moment, Rey has repeatedly closed off, tightening out of concentration. Luke has reminded her that it's _there_ for her, not a distraction._

_She calms. She senses it like rivers of water and wisdom around her.

_

_Shields have to be placed so Luke cannot anticipate her plan. She pounces, angling the saber low at his feet. The man leaps into nowhere, until Rey's hair flurries, and she knows he's somersaulted

right over her._

Good.

_His attacks are stronger, forcing her to move back to the edge of the cliff. Against her wish, Rey is reminded of that horrible first attempt to swim, with Luke trying not to laugh as she sputtered out spit, saltwater and snot. _

He kicks her shin suddenly, and she buckles. Danger seizes wildly at her and she braces herself as her back hits the uneven rock.

Oucchhhh. At least her hands still grip the saber.

She scrambles to her knees just in time for the older man to strike her blade. Rey will buckle eventually. This position's absolute shite on her knees.

Give it a minute.

This move might be super dangerous, she thinks with her shields dampened against Skywalker. However he's shown her he can definitely take care of himself against an eager beginner like her.

She gives the last reserve of strength into a final push, her saber singing against his. Luke's eyes burn blue.

Feeling for the switch, Rey turns off her saber. One hand has already moved down to grab at his robes in case he actually does sail over the cliff.

But of course she's too late.

Shades of gray brush past her eyes.

She gasps, "No!"

"_I'm all right!" he tells her. He's not even upset. Is he impressed?_

Rey blinks, staring at her master from over the cliff. She has to believe what she's seeing, because otherwiseâ€|but no, that's definitely Luke, smiling at her in the middle of the air.

He returns to the ground and holds out his blade, which had tumbled halfway to the sea. Rey's not even sure how high up they are, but the foam looks small from here, like lace on a dress.

"_Sorry. Sorry," she repeats. That was a stupid move, re really could have died just now. _

When Luke looks back up at her, his eyes are bright, butâ€|eager. She senses an inner excitement in him that makes her hesitant to smile back.

"_That's an impressive idea, Rey!"_

_So, a few months later, Rey attempts it again when she fights â€" and kills â€" one of the Ren

practice on force communication."

Rey absorbs the keen interest in Ben's face. He looks genuinely eager about what they've avoided even talking about, a Force bond between master and apprentice that he suddenly attempted on her back on Sher-hatha.

"You mean, read each other's thoughts? Like, faster, in combat?"

"Against a master like Snoke, we'll need everything. My uncle once told me that, long ago, his own master, Obi-Wan Kenobi â€" you've heard of him, I see," he notes at Rey's sudden alertness. "He and his own master, a human named Qui-Gon Jinn, battled a Zabrak Sith. That Sith had the same saber design as your quarter staff."

Rey nods. It's where she got the idea from, thanks to Anakin's detailed account, but she doesn't admit it yet.

"Their movements were very combined, but nothing compared to when Master Kenobi and â€" my grandfather battled together in the Clone Wars."

Rey watches with warm interest at how Ben seems to come alive. He hadn't talked like this when he first began to teach her about how to defeat a Sith. Granted, her newfound studies were a little dark, and Ben was initially reluctant, being entrusted to strengthen her mental abilities. She wishes he could have shared pieces of his own Jedi upbringing with her.

â€|Even though he killed all the others learning about the Force.

A painful lump forms in her throat, making her blink. Oh, Force, this man â€" this dark-haired human who was becoming so close to Rey â€" was a mass murderer. And sheâ€|Kriff, if her eyes were wet, he'd notice â€" but thankfully they weren't.

She's such a horrible person, wanting him. It's a basic attraction, nothing more. She doesn't love him.

Ben interrupts her thoughts with a nod to Rey's sword. "May I see it?"

Reaching to her side, Rey hands it over without even thinking. She's more curious than anything what he thinks.

He inspects it with full interest. His voice becomes softer, almostâ€|friendlier. "I remember you showed me you grew up with a staff."

She knows with a warm trail down her spine he's referring to the memories she shared for him. "It used to be a baton. I'd lash a strap around my wrist ever since that fight with that girl. It worked after that. Then I just screwed more parts on it until it was almost bigger than me."

"A grand weapon for a slight little thing like yourself," he admits with what cannot be mistaken for admiration, even underneath that jab. "You must have made yourself into a predator."

Rey disagrees. Ben's the real predator, all size and incredible control of his body. He is elegance and dignity combined, like a king. "I wanted to train with a sword, with Luke. It looked real nice andâ€¦graceful," she realizes, "the way he fought with one." She won't add the way Ben fights, too. She's jealous, honestly.

"But you have more power and throw all your enemies off-guard with something like this."

She cocks her head at a small realization. "It doesn't make you think that a Sith who once had a double bladed sword like this is something to concern you? I mean, that I've copied it?"

"No." Ben shakes his head in quiet finality. "I'm not as foolish as the Old Jedi Order."

The Old Jedi Order. The one Anakin Skywalker broke down, all for love. She is sure of this, when he told her and when Luke confirmed it, more or less. If the order of Jedi Knights allowed others to marry and feel love, even have families, the Jedi wouldn't have been soâ€¦

Rey considers the way Ben still criticizes the Order he's trying to re-identify with as she stares at the ceiling.

"You agree with me," he assumes from her silence.

"Hmm, no," she ponders. Then, with a cocksure smile she adds, "I would never give you the satisfaction."

She doesn't have to turn her head to see the kind shadow angling his face, where he hides his own discrete smile. She does, anyway.

5. Chapter 5

The Call to the Light

Chapter 5

Ben circles Rey as she sits in the main cabin and meditates. Ben towers over her so much that it's ridiculous.

"You were attacked in the mind. It was flooded with terrors. You need to strengthen your barriers." His voice is subversive and hypnotic like the lull under water. "Confront those active sensations head-on, like an opposing battering ram. An equal but opposite sensation is happiness. True, enriched happiness in the purest form. Focus on it until Snoke doesn't know what to do with it."

Instantly Rey falls back into a moment, vibrant and true, where she, Finn and the same handsome dark-haired pilot Ben's seen before are laughing their heads off at something. The handsome man attracts all the attention in the image, while Finn has nearly fallen off his chair and Rey's face is crinkled in a near-permanent smile. Ben feels a twinge of envy. He watches intensely like he wants to remember this all his own.

"Now think of another one. Quick."

Ben is there when Rey remembers the first time she ate mooja, a traditional Alderaanian delicacy. Ben is a little shocked to see such a complicated dish being served in a Resistance mess hall. It bursts in her mouth, which Ben feels tenfold, and she groans her approval. His mother Leia, who sits across from her, chuckles expectantly.

He swallows. His mother is kind and tender to Rey, the daughter Leia had quietly desired. "Again."

Grime covers Rey/Ben like jungle mucus. Rey is proud of her first day of work (she's nothing but a child here) and earning an extra ration of foodstuff: a fresh liwi fruit. She doesn't realize until later that the overseers tossed it to her to tease her like a pet. To the hazel-eyed child, Rey almost finds some accomplishment making the day a little brighter amidst the dry, barren land.

"Again" "

_It's there before he finishes: the first time she levitates a pebble, starts a flame on a candle, after weeks of fruitless concentration. _

The sheer joy she felt in taking a 'fresher' water sluicing off her skin, her tired soul blooming like a lily.

There's no explicit image of nakedness, but Ben drops the projection immediately.

_So does Rey: running into Finn aboard Starkiller, and later, seeing him awake, after months of training with Luke on some green island, and walking via a projection from Artoo. _

_Resting on Finn's shoulder and falling asleep. Overhearing him say to someone, "No, it's not like that. She's like my sister, you know? She's family." _

She makes a doll on Jakku, a child again, and she plays on the AT-AT. The stars look down on her like they're watching her play.

The sheer, stupid hope she feels as she scratches a little mark on a rusted wall.

Poe flashing a smile and her stomach doing flip-flops.

_Han Solo giving her a smile and the same thing, in fact, the same sensation " _

Ben rips his head out of hers and scowls.

"Good," he concludes. His head is swimming with ache. Too much this time, like when he was a boy and ate too much for supper. His eyes, his mind couldn't resist each projection, even the emotions. Happiness, real happiness, dribbled into his head like a thick lather. It's wrong that these are not his own sensations, and yet he craves the swelling of light and fullness, and freedom, in each period.

He shouldn't pursue these memory exercises anymore. They've become " they've always felt so invasive. More than that, he wants to see

more of her. Kylo Ren would have savored exploring every facet of her past in hopes of finding her weaknesses. Now it's a confusion of desire (not for her, he corrects himself) and self-loathing that makes him feel tired.

Ben finds himself basking in the light, the goodness in each brimming moment, wanting to step out of the observing angle and shield her in her moments of doubt and despair.

"Let's step away from these for now," he suggests with a too-light tone. "You're right, it's too dangerous to practice combat in mid-flight. Let's land somewhere private and have a break."

Rey jumps to her feet. The promise of fresh air and soft ground are too heady to ignore. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

"We're well outside the Outer Rim, still. Just for an hour, and then we'll continue."

The smile she flashes at him is so beaming he can't believe it's directed at him. "All right, then," she says by way of thank you.

[illegible]

They land on a grassy knoll, on a planet that is mostly uninhabited except for flora and fauna. They fight for forty-five minutes, using all the space available like a grand playing field, lunging and somersaulting to their heart's content. Rey's soul expands like the approaching golden sunset, brilliant and joyful that Ben finds himself distracted, his grip on his uncle's saber uncharacteristically slackened.

He has to bite his cheek and tongue whenever she smiles toward him, ever playful in their combat practice. They exchange jokes, taunts and reminders of past maneuvers from Utapau, Kegan and the Star Destroyer Defiant – from when they tried to kill each other.

He tries not to think of the sickening dream from last night, of this young woman's head lolling, broken. It means nothing. It is just a result of his mental exhaustion and confusion over where his fate lies next.

How can it possibly happen, when she is so fiercely alive around him?

When they finally tire and declare each other temporary winners, they put away their sabers and collapse onto the grass. For now, cabin fever has been fought off. Ben returns to the Falcon and comes back with a jug of water. They pass it between each other like it were a bottle of wine and watch the sun transform the sky from fine pink to brilliant, ocean green.

S S

Of course, the bliss doesn't last. The interior of the Falcon feels less homely to the two occupants now that they're continuing into the black. They spend dinner in choked silence, as if aware that the past touches they shared today are clear reminders of the forbidden vision Rey accidentally revealed to him.

It was a dream from almost a year ago, weeks after Rey first arrived on Ach-To. They were fighting in a forest, and Rey, in the dream, kissed Kylo Ren. Rey had blamed it on a basic form of attraction. No way could there be a sudden lapse in their relationship from exclusive enemies, forever linked in battles between the Order and the Resistance, to lovers.

But now, after Luke Skywalker's plan to rescue Ben and return him to the Light side actually worked, and Rey and Ben have admitted a sense of respect and civility towards each other she doesn't know anymore.

At least _she_ doesn't feel so wrong about it. The man next to her is the one who acts so obstinate and repulsed by it: kissing her.

She won't bring it up again, ever. Maybe it won't ever become anything. Maybe it was just some extremely vague interpretation of their working together, of bringing Ben back into the Light side of the Force.

Looking at the other Jedi, Rey knows they've both worked hard to have earned this placid compliance with each other. They have a responsibility to each other now, as the last possible Jedi alive for a long time.

Her thoughts are broken as Ben restlessly sets his utensil into the bowl. "I think I lost my appetite already," he murmurs in his deep tone.

Right as he stands up to the trash compactor, Rey says in her clipped accent, "Don't waste that."

Ben pauses, surprised at her command. In another second he understands the reason why she glares at the bowl with stern interest.

He stares back at the meat and vegetables, his mouth suddenly dry from the imagined sensation of knowing only stale bread and the sparing reprieve of water. In their memory sessions, Ben's felt his belly shrivel up in the way Rey's starved on Jakku. He never thought water could taste stale, either, but he knows now, how Rey will glaze her eyes over a leftover cup of water, much less a river.

He throws a pinched look in her direction, remembering the first time he met her and how small, almost feral she was, dancing away from him like some wild animal. Hunger was a scar that had never left her, even though in her time with the Resistance she's sharply appeared healthier.

He offers the bowl to her, then says, "Not that you look like you need the extra helpings."

His ego soars at the way her jaw drops. "Are you serious?" The "o" of her mouth twitches into a smile, as if she were to say, _clever bastard_.

"That's how people turn into Hutts, you know." He settles back into his chair.

"What, finishing the food they want to eat for dinner?" Rey sounds incredulous.

"It's what my mother used to say to me all the time. I'd come in and load up my plate until it was a small pyramid and then she started scolding me."

When he looks back up, Rey is leaning her hover-seat out to a full 45-degree tilt, reaching with strain to a shelf where there's an extra helping of food.

She does this for about twenty more seconds until Ben has to levitate it down for her.

Against Rey's burning face, Ben shakes his head, incredulous. "Do you honestly have days where you forget you're a Jedi?"

Rey's protest is at the tip of her tongue, but it's useless articulating against him. He stares at her knowing he's right.

"Sometimes, yeah," she settles.

"Unbelievable," he says, shaking his head. "There is a special kind of hell I'm stuck in."

"Don't let your ego hurt the way out of your arse," she yells behind him as he walks to his room. She's not sure if she's being playful, or if he'll treat it as such. Just as she swivels in the chair she finds herself flying five feet out of it. She waves out her hands to cover herself from sprawling onto the ground.

Prick, she thinks.

S S

A combination of exhaustion and boredom have sent Rey into a deep sleep. She was meditating before, attempting to sense Finn and Poe, but the vast distance and the hyperspace are too much to reach them. The whole practice fight has left her body tingling with real, healthy tiredness.

When she dreams, she goes back into the past. An older man, lean with corded muscles and a beaten face, looms into the foreground. It's been years since she's last seen, or thought of, that face. The strongest features are his blue eyes and smug glare. And, perhaps the most bewitching impression is the hot, molten feeling from between her legs.

Rey is probably twenty-one and hasn't been touched by a man in a long, long time. She takes pride in the fact that, except that one time in all her desolate years on Jakku, she's never had to resort to selling herself like some livestock animal.

Rey had been seventeen, starving, and willing to do anything for food and water. Though it was a loss to her snagged remnant of self-worth on that barren planet, the encounter between her and the man could have ended in many worse ways.

No one knows about it, not even Ben. Luke may have seen a slice of an

image, but he had never asked her about it. No one would understand.

Since then, the significance of sex hadn't risen until she had barreled off-world with Finn and BB-8, aboard the Falcon. Finn's unorganized but earnest interest in her hadn't been ignored. Well, she hadn't thought about it in-depth until Rey had been alone on Ach-To for too long, and suddenly Luke had told her he and Artoo had a surprise for her.

When the first image of Finn moving and talking came through, despite the poor holo-reception, something clear and colorful had burst through her heart. She wasn't sure if it was just the shock and relief at seeing Finn recovering from near-death. In between lectures and discussions about the relationship with the Force, shared with an old man and his ghost-father, Rey had secretly stowed away the idea that, maybe, things could be different with her. Her and Finn.

It never happened because Jessika Pava had swept Finn's heart, wholeheartedly.

Rey was only a little disappointed. Mostly, she had projected self-doubt in her own looks compared to a bronze beauty like Jess.

Poe had saved her from any insecurity when he first flirted with her. Thank goodness he is her friend, and that she wasn't so innocent to mistake it for anything more, but it did bolster something in her. She is a woman, after all, lithe and robust in her own way.

And then, of course, because they were all in a war, all of that silliness mattered less, in between dying youths and explosions. And a cold, cruel man in a mask, and a tragic, tender face.

6. Chapter 6

The Call to the Light

Chapter 6 complete

"I've been thinking."

Not even an hour later, and Rey's returned to Ben's side.

He realizes that countering her comment with a jab at her ability to think (at all) is an immaturity he cannot succumb to.

"Go on," is all he says, eyes on a datapad.

"I have an idea about what we should do."

She waits until he sighs and looks at her fully.

"There's a lot of crime out here," she begins.

"No."

The argument she had neatly assembled in her head crumbles at his dismissal. "Hey, I haven't even explained yet!"

"Whatever it is, it's risky and causes attention to ourselves, which we can't allow."

Blinking angrily, Rey steps forward. "Wait â€" you tell me we're supposed to go to Jakku for Force knows why, you won't even tell me, and I make a suggestion on how to spend the next four weeks and you dismiss it like that? Who died and made you captain?"

The former First Order killer instantly pales, making Rey swallow.

"What did you just say?"

"Look," she begins, "I didn't mean that â€" "

"Your desire to interfere in all matters of the galaxy will get us both followed and destroyed. The only mission you and I have in this war is to destroy Snoke. That is our single purpose, and nothing else."

"Not to me, you inbred," she retorts. "I plan to do more good than just kill one person."

"Between the two of us, I'm definitely not inbred," he points out with intensity, leaning forward until he blocks the light. "Children born from incest are usually left alone to die, you know."

Her eyes and teeth gleam in false humor. "Funny. You're the one obsessed with your Skywalker bloodline."

He scowls and retreats further into the ship.

"Look, there's a lot we can do out here," she says at his heels. "There's all kinds of organized crime, like drug and spice trafficking, pirating, slavery," she hints knowingly. "I'm not talking about helping criminals, you know â€" "

"I can imagine the possibilities," he mocks nastily, moving some of the furniture back. "Give presents to poor children, build a school â€" "

"Earn your redemption?" she hints. "You can't possibly think that, just letting all these bad things happen, is the Jedi way? Sounds a little too much like how the Old Jedi Order did things."

She's goading him into saying yes. Rey needs him to get angry. She won't spend another day in this ship just talking about how to do the greater good, not when there are people who are like her, like Anakin, Luke and Han, who were left out of the shade of the Republic to protect only themselves.

Ben is still. He might actually be thinking about it.

"No. Absolutely not."

Rey's jaw drops. "Why not?"

"It's too dangerous, Rey."

"We won't be recognized out here," she tries to reason. "We could cover our faces â€" "

"Rey. Let it go," he warns slowly.

"Look- stop! Come on." Pleading now, she reaches out and grabs the fabric on his elbow. She won't actually touch him, especially when he narrows his eyes at her. "I'm tired of waiting and being asked to hide. I need to do something. Finn and Poe always got to fight while I was held back to...deal with you," she says lamely. "Don't you want to do something good? You can't just try to earn your redemption from being my teacher."

His pride seethes at the idea his destiny is tethered to her. He sets down a table, switches a magnetizing switch bluntly, and sternly holds out his hands. "Get us to Jakku first. That's all that matters right now."

Disappointment echoes like a heavy stone in her head. He isn't having it. He's so stubbornly blind to the bigger picture here, out in the farthest civilized corner of the world.

Her hand drops from clutching his shirt.

"I can't wait that long. You know what â€" ?" she decides suddenly, back straightening at a burden lifted. "You can take the Falcon to Jakku. I'll set off on my own."

Ben seems to deflate and swell at the same time. "With what?" his voice clatters in the room. "Why are you so desperate to become some vigilante? Our destiny lies with Snoke â€" "

A hideous laughter breaks from her lips. "'Our destiny lies with Snoke.' Fuck him, all right? His sorry arse can wait. You still sound like his errand boy, the way you tie yourself to him."

Ignoring the stifling emotions ready to burst from him, Rey scratches her head. "You owe it to your family."

She's so angry at him that she won't even clarify who, specifically, in his family. She knows, since Luke confided he didn't tell Ben about Anakin's birthplace as a slave on Tatooine. Leia and Han had strictly ordered Luke not to talk about Anakin. To them, especially to Leia, Anakin was always Vader. It's possible Ben had found out as Kylo Ren â€" but then again, maybe Snoke didn't allow it. Kylo Ren worshipped Vader. Such humble and filthy beginnings could work wither way to the Sith's godly status.

This time Rey retreats to the cockpit, again. Gods and stars, she thinks, slamming in to the pilot's chair. She doesn't think she can take another day of their arguing. He still won't explain to her what's on Jakku. Ever since they boarded the Falcon, it's been a struggle to be polite enough to form some plan. If only Leia, Luke â€" or even Anakin â€" were here.

Well. Maybe Anakin could.

"Anakin, Kohn-deesa, mesh-pardu," she groans, willing the image of Ben's grandfather, the bronze-haired young man to appear. But that would be too easy for a

Force-ghost.

SSS

Another unbearable hour later, and Rey stands up to stretch. It's late and she's on her way to her room. They've got another eight hours to go before dropping out of hyperspace to refuel at a discrete spaceport.

When she turns around, she sees something " a stylus " float in front of her. Her abilities are quite grounded, so it's not her by accident. The disturbance in the Force zeroes in on her, and she knows it's coming from Ben.

She's careful not to rush to his room, but concern runs a little warm in her chest. The last time she sensed he was hurt was an awful scene â€” he had stabbed himself in the side, and above was some too-real vision of Kylo Ren.

She undoes the switch to his room, hesitant. He'll kill her for coming in.

Everything, from a datapad to a few cups, even the blanket, floats. As soon as she steps inside, they all begin to shake.

On the floor, Ben's snowy, shirtless back arcs. He lets out a sound so sudden that Rey jumps.

Swallowing, Rey creeps closer, pushing away the floating debris until she kneels at his side

"Ben." She says softly. Her hand hovers nervously over his shoulder. She's had to touch his skin before, but " she doesn't want to.

She has to, though. She settles for a little shake on the shoulder. "Ben, wake up." It feels so wrong to be here. She waits as long as she can before saying again, "Come on, something's wrong."

In another blink the skin and muscles shiver. Ben Solo's flipped around in a defensive position, grabbing at her.

Rey's seized forward, suddenly too, too close to his agitated face. Sweat makes his night-colored hair stick to his forehead and cheeks. His lips are inches away from hers, and his eyes " he looks as if he's seen someone hurt.

When he exhales hurriedly, his breath comes out in nervous fumes, clouding her nose and even her eyes. His fingers flex around her wrist, realizing she's right there.

"_Rey_."

And that's what does it; the random touch that makes Rey's stupid mind jump to some fiery, desirous instinct. He's so close and wounded by something that he refuses to let her see, and she's here next to him right now; why won't he let her _see_ â€”

She just wants to help him â€œ"

Instead she is blinded by fire, red-hot and punishing, searing

anything in its path. Is it Starkiller? His old lightsaber?_

And beyond the light, probably more horrifying, are the screams. They are endless, a head-splitting cacophony of raw noise and spoken pleas.

It's torn away in a second. Like she is a hot brand, Ben swiftly lets go and moves away.

"What are youâ€|?" He tries to mask the movement by sitting up properly.

This, alone, is what makes her shy and cower; this unnatural impotence from him that isn't hardened by stubbornness or sternness. "I know. I-I'm sorry. I didn't know â€" "

"Get out," he prompts without emotion.

Rey does want to get out. She doesn't want to see him like this, shirtless and vulnerable.

"Iâ€|what _was_ that?" she finds herself asking instead.

Their argument from an hour ago is forgotten. She leans into the mattress and feels his think scent condensed in the threadbare sheets.

Like a switch, his slackened guard is gone. His barriers snap into place and he sharpens with cold eyes and a hard mouth. "Do you have any idea what you're doing? Throwing yourself at me like some starved child?"

Rey's mouth goes dry, but she doesn't recoil. "I'm not doing anything," she whispers.

All of the things in the room clatter to the floor, making Rey grit her teeth in shock. As if her presence is a burr, Ben gets to his feet and snaps the falling blanket out of the way.

"You need toâ€|I need you out." He stomps away, off the mattress.

"Do youâ€|do you always see that? In your head?" she asks, concerned. No wonder he never shares his own mind in their memory exercises. She had initially dismissed it as a choice based on her sake, so she wouldn't hate him, but nowâ€|now, seeing him so pale and lost, so tormented, she thinks for maybe the first time, how hard it is to be _him_.

"For Force's sake, just go!" he almost bellows, pointing to the door. "I can't have you here!"

The Force crackles madly around him. His hands hover by his head as if it's about to roll off his neck. Rey is utterly perplexed, feeling almost as helpless as herâ€|her friend looks.

Something that's been bothering her returns in the small room. "Why are we going back to Jakku, Ben?" When she speaks his name, it's with the hope that it will pierce the cloud that unsettles him.

"I don't want to talk about that now," he mutters, lacing his fingers over his head and pulling.

"_Why_ are we going to _Jakku_, Ben? Just tell me," she implores.

"Why won't you just _shut up and leave me alone_?" he hisses nastily, teeth gritting like fangs.

Rey is speechless. He's repressing; from all they have worked for on Sher-hatha, sitting next to each other on the beach, coaching her how to hold her breath under water, him holding her after learning that Jess died, their easier conversations—he is struggling like on Starkiller, barely keeping himself upright.

"I have to find them," he tells her, the trace of a whine lacing through so that he is begging. "I have to go back and—I don't know, there are just answers and I HAVE to answer for - !"

He halts in his half-mad explanation. Watching him, Rey remembers the way she found him bleeding in his cell from a self-inflicted wound, and a manifestation from his own consciousness of himself dressed as Kylo Ren. It was so powerful a vision that Rey had to curse it away.

Everybody will want him dead. Rey once did, too. It had taken a lot of convincing from Luke, the only one besides Leia, who could still forgive him immeasurably for all of his crimes against life.

She's horrified to feel _herself_ shaking, her throat tearing like she wants to whimper, too.

"Okay," she says shakily. "Okay. Um. I'm—going to get you some water. Just, take a deep breath, all right? Ben. Ben," she says, keeping her body language harmless, her connection in the Force subdued and tranquil for him to feed on.

"I'll be right back."

7. Chapter 7

The Call to the Light

Chapter 7

She shuffles out of the little closet-room and sorts through for some clean cups. It looks more inviting to have a cup for herself. When she comes back, he's hanging by the doorframe with a shirt on (thank kriff), breathing in and out like long, forced sips.

"D'you want to sit here?" she gestures to the table.

When he approaches, she ignores his clenching fists, his thick veins flexing from his skin.

"I'm. I'm sorry you —"

"You don't have to apologize," she cuts in quickly, more to spare him than to forgive him. "Are you—hurt?"

His posture returns to its usual stiff reluctance as he shakes his head, like he's on trial. Discretely, Rey checks that she's not sitting too close to him. She hates that this somehow her fault, no matter how much she wants to help pull his demons out of him.

She's not a counselor. Finn would make a better counselor right now. All she's done with him is fuck things up, evidenced by the faint, smooth scar across his face.

Please. Please let me help you.

"Was that â€" the screamingâ€"do you always feel that?"

He is staring a hole in the table. "What do you think."

Fine, okay. "Is that why we have to go to Jakku? Becauseâ€"you think they will stop?"

His lips thaw into some slight grin, humoring in her innocent question.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Not touching me will help," he warns her.

"I just want to see that you're all right. I don't want to see you hurt."

He huffs in sick amusement, making Rey want to bang her head on the table.

"I _don't_, " she repeats. "You helped me. You told me that I made you want to fight for the Light again. That..."_ I'm the only thing you believe in now_â€"This is not something Rey has the strength to say. "â€"On the beach, after my friend Jess died. Remember?"

"You can't help me with this," he says quietly.

"Why not? I just want to help. Even you deserve that."

The way the corners of his eyes crinkle make him look like he's smiling, somehow. "That's because you always want to help. Someone, anyone." Through the Force, she senses a slight thread of affection offered her way. "Rey." He hasn't said her name in a while. There is a closeness in the careful tone. He gets to his feet, needing some space. "It doesn't go away likeâ€"a switch. There will always beâ€"I will always see them. There's so many of them."

It's not like she's _forgotten_. Not completely. Justâ€" "I'm sorry," she offers.

"Don't. Don't ever â€" " he tries, severe and on edge.

Her face burns. She hates herself for worrying about him, only for him to be stupidly realistic and remind her he was a terrible, terrible, evil person, and she had once hated him more than she needed to breathe.

Ben doesn't speak. He must sense her conflicted feelings. He seems to

draw less air in an effort to be still.

She wants to disappear, too, cauterizing a hole in the table. Kriff, he's just a man and she's not afraid of him. Even if she cares for him.

There. She's admitted it. She's attracted to him, in shades of passive admiration of his strange face to full-on "I-must-touch-him" desire. And she cares for him. Well done, Leia, you've found your son an admirer.

He was damned before anyone could try to save him. It's a reminder, always, that she could have ended up like him. If anyone could understand him, want him, it's her.

"I wishâ€|" she finds herself saying. "I wish I had been there. For whenâ€|before it allâ€|"

Ben's stare almost dares her to shut up. "You would not have been able to stop me."

"Yeah, I could have," she argues, still, in a small, stubborn voice.

Ben's expression is finally overcome with tender serenity. His eyes are warm again, awed at her brazen, sharp optimism.

"That'sâ€|that's the most that anyone could ever give me," he concludes in a painfully relaxed tone.

Rey relaxes, too, gripping the metal cup tighter than before. For a moment the demons are gone.

Before the awkwardness settles in, there's an alarm. Ben stares up at it and pales.

"There's another ship."

They're in hyperspace, though. "Are we being followed?"

Ben doesn't have to answer. Whoever's right behind them must have a powerful ship â€" and a strong desire to capture the Falcon.

Alarmed, both bolt to the cockpit. Rey's smaller and hops into the pilot's seat, while Ben looms over.

"Is it First Order?" he demands.

"I can't tell from the signal." Rey glares at the console as she scans the sensors. "It looks like a really old frequency - "

When she looks up at him, his eyes are dead ahead and unfocused. Rey inhales: he's searching through the Force in hyperspace.

"Not a First Order vessel, or personnel," he tells her. "But they could be bounty hunters."

"Fuck. There's no shortage of those," Rey mutters under her breath.

"Where are we right now?"

Rey's fingers flit over a viewscreen. "Sirhaussa fields. We're a couple parsecs from a few spare moons along the Daur'ha Belt â€" "

" â€" Asteroid fields?" he says, suddenly sharp.

"Yeah, Kriff â€" !" Rey's stomach drops. If they don't drop out of hyperspace now, they'll collide right into the asteroid field and fucking _die_.

She whips her head at Ben, who's still standing.

"Sit down!"

Right when she tries to shove him into a seat, the _Falcon_ drops out of light-speed, making everything lunge from whiplash.

Alarms sound off as rocks the size of houses swerve and bounce off the suddenly-tiny ship. Rey's a pretty good pilot, but in here there are too many overwhelming factors.

Add the key sound of blaster fire â€" "

"Fuck! Damnit!"

From behind Ben tugs her by the shoulders. "Out. Out of the seat, now." His movements are swift and calm as he manhandles her into the co-pilot's seat and him at the main controls.

"There's two of them â€" one's at our upcoming right â€" "

"Hush," he commands. Rey blinks; his tone is suddenly gruff and impatient, so much like the last owner of this ship. Ben's fierce eyes scour the viewscreen, just like how Han used to, while Rey could only watch and attempt to look like she was helping the whole time.

"There's a lever under the console, in front of your chair."

There's a horrible crunch outside, making everything shudder. Rey prays there isn't a break in the hull.

"What lever?" she asks dubiously over the claxon sounds.

"Under _there_, " he snaps, pointing down.

Grinding her teeth, Rey peers and feels around. She doesn't know what he's talking about; there's no lever â€" "

Just as her fingers brush against a crevice (that _definitely_ hadn't been there before), she's thrown back into the seat. The restraints snakes around her, buckling her in with invisible hands.

She snaps her head over to Ben, who's biting his tongue in concentration. "Just hang on."

He turns the ship wildly into an impossible arc. Rey's brain and bones throttle against her body. For a few peaceful seconds, there's

no sound of asteroids banging the ship. He's expertly sailing around them, until "â€

The lever. Pull it, now, he tells her with crisp necessity.

Rey throws her hand out and clutches the lever from its bed. There is a small thrust from underneath. Through the window of the cockpit she can catch random pieces of junk, mostly durasteel, cargo containersâ€|a few bones, scraps of cloth and a severed hand press into the glass.

"Whaâ€| "

Whoever shot us will think they've destroyed the _Falcon_. There's enough scraps he hid underneath for years.

"How can we hide?" she wonders, forgetting to communicate through thought alone.

"Watch."

Unusually calm, even pleased with himself, Ben glides the still-intact _Falcon_ onto somethingâ€|solid. He switches on a gravitational pull and an atmospheric densifier, as if they've landed somewhere.

"Are weâ€| "

The view of space swerves so uncontrollably, despite the grounded-ness Ben's selected, that there's only one answer.

"Did you seriously just land us on an asteroid?" she asks in a small voice. Her hazel eyes are blown wide at the furious dance of gray rocks.

Ben makes a few adjustments and gets to his feet like he's about to hop into the 'fresher. "Of course I did."

"That."

Her emotionless, stupefied voice makes Ben turn back to her.

"That. Was the mostâ€|," she breathes out, finally facing him. "You clever _bastard_."

Ben inhales. The cockpit suddenly feels much smaller, for he's grown a few feet from her praise. She's genuinely marveling at him, almost like their talk hadn't happened a few minutes ago.

He ducks his head finally, letting his hair cover his face as he allows a secret smile.

"I did more than learn how to walk in here, you know." He mutters this excuse. "Help me shut everything down. There's a coolant â€"

"

" â€" That can avoid thermal detection, right," Rey finishes, springing back to life. She flutters into movement, flying past him into the main cabin.

Twenty minutes later, the two wait under the cover of the thick asteroid field.

Ben's deep under in meditation, sensing how far away the earlier bounty hunter ships are now, and of the local populace nearby.

After a few more tense minutes, Ben emerges. "What does the databank say?"

Rey glances back at one of the computer screens. He waits a few beats until she haltingly reads out from the bank. "The Daur-ha belt's colonized byâ€|small-time commmâ€|commercialâ€|groups, I guess, and aâ€|a 'stellar view of some astrological rarity.' Though nothing looks particularly unique out here."

"We may be out of season right now," he muses, his eyes warily peeled for incoming ships. "What else?"

Rey is more hesitant, this time, shaking her head at the foreign markings. Reading anything more than basic piloting symbols or mechanical signs isn't part of her education.

Rey ignores the hot impatience (coming from her, not him) and clears her throat. "Um. Sorry, I can't understand half of this."

Ben narrows his eyes for one second, then they smooth over as he gets up. Arching over her at the viewscreen, he reads: "'A few thousand nomads and foolish scholarly tourists flock here and try to mix with the thick-skinned locals and more gruff passers-by.' Sounds accurate for a midway station like this." Ben is pensive as he sits back down.

Across from him, Rey can practically read the half-formed idea in his head. "What? What are you thinking?"

"We're far too out west from any First Order outpost. We can either wait in this position another day and continue travellingâ€|or we could dock here and investigate what they came here for."

"So they did stop? The two ships?"

"One did. The other continued through hyperspace. They bought the ruse."

Ben's focus on the spaceport nearby suggests something more than sneaking behind a couple sleazy bounty hunters. Ben's too cautious for that.

In an instant it clicks. "You want to find out what they've been saying about you. The First Order."

The man casts a mildly annoyed glare at her discovery. "It's been almost two weeks since I disappeared. Word will have definitely gone out. I'm featured in almost all of the propaganda holovids."

Rey looks away. Those propaganda holovids are sickening. It makes Finn glower and retreat into himself at the way the Stormtroopers shout their loyalty in mantras, or the way that irritable red-haired leader, Hux, enunciates each syllable of his hateful speeches.

Ben â€" or, Kylo Ren â€" was almost always seen skulking about in his mask and black robes. He was the symbol, more fearsome than any thousand-man field of 'troopers or a furious Hux. At least Rey and Finn knew the human face underneath the costume.

She has no chance in suggesting he stay here while she investigates, or skip visiting the spaceport at all. "D'you think it's all right, that anyone will recognize you?"

Ben sniffs with derisive confidence. "No. The only people in the Order who know me areâ€|"

Snoke, Hux, and the few Ren knights that are still alive. That is too many.

Ben grits his teeth, growling out his temper. "Damn it."

"I'll go."

Ben's posture is all ice again at the idea. "No you won't. Not by yourself."

"I'll cover myself up, and we've got blasters. There's a trunk full of clothes and helmets. We can pass as trade scouts or something."

Rey is already out the cockpit, waiting for him to follow her. A bad feeling sinks in, but damned if this 130-pound girl takes the lead any longer.

8. Chapter 8

The Call to the Light

Chapter 8

Boshtar Webb's given Rey some civilian clothes, too. Under a wine-colored woolen vest-tunic is a tan shirt with long sleeves. She prefers not to wear boots with hard heels, so she's opted for light shoes with laces that are good for running.

There's a pair of nice boots Webb left her, which fit quite well. She supposes if she's going to be in danger and needs to kick someone, the boots will work best.

She's put on a thin but sturdy jacket, in case someone happens to pull a knife. Her lightsaber is strapped against her leg, so she finds a scarf to wrap around her waist to drape over it.

Ben is whipping a black jacket over his shoulders. It's a split-second gesture, but the way he shrugs it on, straightens it, even tucks his hair out from the collar, makes her mind go blank and her ears burn.

"It's not a good idea for us to separate," he advises, ever the order-giver as Rey pulls out a clean scarf.

"Fine, but you're not going looking like that. You'll need something to cover your face." There's a simple-looking visor that will cover

the top part of his face. She offers it to him.

Ben pauses. "I won't need one. I'll keep a low profile."

Rey looks at him dubiously.

Irrked at her doubt, he turns his head. "Hasn't my uncle taught you how to sift through a crowd undetected? It may be a Jedi Trick, but â€" "

"I know, but still, I wouldn't risk it. If the First Oder really published your face with a price on it, then maybe everyone's really focused on finding you. Just a thought."

Ben seems to debate this for a few seconds, then takes the helmet with a low huff.

As he adjusts it in his hands, he speaks to the floor. "I was just getting used to not needing one."

Wrapping the scarf around her face, Rey projects a short puff of sympathy to him.

"Should we bother refueling?" she asks him. Just to let him feel a sense of control, of wisdom.

"Not in an outpost like this. It's better we remain untethered." In case we have to escape, he doesn't have to say.

"Right." She goes back to the cockpit, removes the gravitational pull on the asteroid and pilots the _Falcon_ towards the outpost. Ben remains standing behind her chair, his gloved hand resting on the seat.

"There doesn't look to be a lot of security, so we don't have to dock in the hanger bays."

"Though this place is overrun by thieves," he reminds her. He gazes across the approaching surface, suddenly leaning so far over that his face hovers right next to hers. "Lights off. Set it down over there."

Rey nearly gulps, controlling her breathing. He's so close to her she can smell his heady scent.

To make things worse, he leans even closer â€" "No, there," - pointing to an abandoned building in a condemned area.

As soon as she turns on the landing gear, he retreats, then halts. "You don't know about the booby traps, do you?"

Rey's eyebrows shoot up. "Noâ€|?"

He grins openly. Well, to him, wickedly. "Only one way to keep everyone out of this ship."

Rey deflates a little in her seat, now realizing he's restless enough to _want_ to cause trouble.

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They decide to head into the center of town, roughly 100 feet from each other. Better to look like they didn't come together.

You've been in places like this before? she asks through the Force.

Naturally. When I was still Luke's padawan. Though I didn't interact well with the locals, ever. The price of being Princess Leia Organa's son.

A light goes off in her head. Only recently did Leia make it public that her son was actually Kylo Ren. Before that, they had kept it secret, that he had died in the second Purge (which he had caused).

_Are there pictures of you â€" _ she begins to ask in alarm.

_When I was ten. My mother kept a very low profile for me. I was homeschooled before joining the Jedi. _

Homeschooling. Not normal school like she knows people had in their childhoods. It sounds a little lonely; but then, she understands loneliness.

They get closer to the bustle of the city. There are a few tourists, young and stupid-looking from the Inner Rim, looking for some rough adventure among the poor and unkind.

Don't be prejudiced against them, Ben advises, amused at her low hum of displeasure.

"Hmph."

They extend their senses, letting the Force feed on the people's mental signals. It's a buzzing mixture of interest from shoppers and sellers, squalling hungry younglings, and dead-eyed homeless. Rey's learned, in a personal coping experience of her own, to compare the noises and senses like music. She heard some random concert piece from Artoo, who was playing it for Luke in Ach-To, when she was first so moved from it. Since returning to the galaxy for the Resistance, her powers were heightened enough that a poor focus could give her a headache.

Something's pulling her away, now. This is usually a telltale sign that someone, a stranger, is focusing on her. Either that or danger is coming close.

Without knowing where she's going, she folds into the crowd of market-sellers in the dank, narrow street. There is something familiar ahead. It's not just a pull now, it's a hot, electrical heat, thick as burning sand.

There's a smell, too. Engine grease.

Something stops her in the middle of the street. Under his visor, Ben stares down at her.

What is it?

Looking back with a shaking head, she thinks, _I don't know. _They're in front of an entrance to a cheap cantina carved into the stone, but inside it bolsters with live music, raucous laughter and stinking alcohol.

I think we should go in.

Ben doesn't let go of her. "For what?" he whispers over her.

She taps his fingers over her bicep crisply. "For a drink?"

It's too bad she can't see his face under the visor. His eyes must be burning, she thinks with mischief.

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The downstairs is a sea of drunk people. It's honestly no different than when the Resistance crew gets rowdy after a victory, and Rey misses it, and them, terribly. This is her familiar calling: sounds, laughter, music, swaying, grumbling, a clumsy cacophony of glee and murky lust.

After so long in the desert of dead, bone-dry silence, this is like life.

One time, off-planet from Ach-to, Rey had followed Luke Skywalker into a bar for some information. She was shocked and amused to see him sitting somewhere with a woman on his lap and another doing some knife-dance. Luke just sat there like he wasn't some celibate mystic, like he was always a bachelor smoking with them the whole afternoon. Whatever signs of careless youth that had been hidden away under his gray hair, it melted away in Rey's eyes.

"I realized," he told her with another puff of sweet smoke. "It really doesn't hurt to enjoy the simpler things in life."

Now, as she descends into the ground floor, she thinks Ben needs to be lectured the same thing.

The man hangs back, although by a hairline of restraint. _You want to get drunk now ?

I don't want to get drunk, she corrects him, enjoying this too much. _I said I just want a drink. People drink in bars. We can get plenty of First Order news here._

His unease simmers, making Rey push away the connection. For fuck's sake, she can take care of herself.

Just as she heads to the bar she's slammed from behind. The back of her neck is soaked with something.

"Shit! Sorry!"

"What the fuck â€" "

"Dude, Maker, I'm so sorry â€" "

Ben is already on his way.

Easy, I've got this.

Not one to look like he's taking orders, Ben straightens in the middle of the cantina floor. _I'll leave you to it, then. _

She ignores him and focuses back on the hastily apologetic human male who looks her age, and initially nice-looking. He could easily pass as one of these college boys looking to have some risk in their otherwise cushioned life.

He's perfect. Time to play a role, then.

Rey doesn't like to do the Jedi Mind Trick very much, not unless it was really necessary. She's learned that passing as a clueless but amiable girl provides less work on her part (something Jess and Poe taught her).

She tugs on the scarf covering her mouth, adapting the Basic accent again. "I just bought this jacket, you blind fucko!"

"I was totally out of it, can I â€" can I buy you a drink? You know, in case youâ€"|"

The human is actually human_oid_. Besides the change Rey notices in his heartbeat pattern, his eyes are an uncharacteristic plum-hazel, and under his dirty blond hair are two low, mohawk-like ridges along each side of his skull.

"â€"Haven't ordered a drink already," he finishes lamely, seeing Rey's hands are empty. The sticky sweetness of the drink adds to Rey's irritation.

The young male is speechless for a moment. Just before Rey snaps her fingers in his face, he shakes himself. "I'm! I'm Terric."

Um. Okay. "And I'm _wet_, " she reminds him.

"Right! Here, let me get you some napkins, hang on."

The poor youth is so eager like a premature firecracker that it's pathetic. Yeah, Ben has nothing to worry about this little pup of a man.

Terric comes back and sizes up her soaked scarf awkwardly. He begins to pat down her head and chin, like he's brushing a feral tuskat that hasn't eaten in days.

Enjoying his struggle, Rey cocks out her hip and puts her hands on her waist. "Are you serious right now?"

"Yeah, well," Terric says, approaching her. "I mean, it's a dark room in here andâ€"|" he throws the wet napkins carelessly over his head, and his fingers reach to one end of the scarf. Deftly, he unwraps the cloth from her face until it brushes off her shoulders.

"And you gotta admit. You've got pretty stunning eyes."

Okay. Under normal circumstances, Rey would slap him for that. Butâ€"|wow. This complete stranger just touched her. And Rey just let

him do that.

She must look stupefied at his courage, for he grins.

"So. I'm _Terric_," he reminds her in this easy, friendly tone.

Rey is so strongly reminded of Finn and his goodness that she doesn't walk away. It's all gone because she's on a mission.

"Whatever."

"Okay, Whatever. What can I get you to drink?"

Why is this so fun? "How about you make my boyfriend over there jealous?" she answers with a discrete swing of her head.

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Plastering himself near a crowded table, by the wall so that shadows practically drown him, Ben perks his head in rising concern. Rey had cut him off from sensing her, assuring him she was fine against that brain-damaged pretty boy.

Until they both looked in his direction.

"Maker," he whispers under his breath. _What are you up to?_

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"Where is he?"

"Heâ€|Oh, I guess he must have stepped out. He's a smoker. Well, it doesn't matter. He looks no different from any of those tall, dark and brooding idiots."

"Yeesh. He's a shy fella, isn't he?"

"Yeah, well. We're on our honeymoon."

Terric throws an incredulous look at her.

"I'm just kidding!" she jokes. "No, we're traveling, and we've been trying to get some work as trade runners, but his permit expired recently. We're based onâ€"|" she hesitates. "We were based on Hosnia Prime."

Terric's mouth opens a little. "Holy shit."

"Yeah, well." Honest emotion tingles through her until her eyes burn.
"We were the only ones in our families offworld at the time."

Terric could be a few years older, but his expression tempers from outwardly eager to sober. "Yeah, mine too."

Oh. Now she feels really bad. Against her good intentions, though, Rey finds the opening. "Well, tell you what. I'll take you up on your offer and we'll toast to home."

S S

They hadn't agreed to split up, however Ben can't seem to concentrate on asking these sleaze-balls around him for information. He watches Rey become something else, something relaxed and friendly (though still armed with her edge, to keep this college boy alert), and he's a little fascinated.

He finds himself grinning to himself at the sudden jump to laughter she makes. The young man relaxes, but still, Ben can't help but think of a tuskat, or a Jespi cobra tricking its prey into false safety.

His Rey is not so harmless.

He wants to pry a little further in, enough that she can't sense him (she can sense him faster now, his signature is so intimately known to her), but there is a small pressure aimed at his side.

"She's cute," says a gruff Coruscanti accent, a few inches below his ear. "You'll find I'm a lot cuter. Let's go outside."

9. Chapter 9

The Call to the Light

Chapter 9 complete

If it wasn't for the low purr of violence brimming from this man (or the blaster against him), Ben would have mistaken that he was being sexually propositioned.

Ohhhh. Ben could grin until his face splits. Now he knows, those fuckers on the other bounty hunter ship did wait until they landed on the Belt.

Rey's wasting her time trying to chat up this clueless youth. All Ben had to do was sit and wait for one of the hunters to snag him

And now they must think he will go quietly.

His lightsaber feels attentively heavy. Ben holds out his hands, showing he is unarmed.

He doesn't bother to alert Rey he's been caught. This will all be over in a bloody mess outside.

In the darkened alleyway, he casually observes the shorter, slim man with wiry strength. He's dressed in nondescript rags and a leather visor that covers everything but his eyes and forehead.

Apparently that's the style for criminals around here.

Under the smattering of luminescent asteroids, his facial features are vaguely human. "Take off your visor. That's it."

"Do you have any idea who I am?" the shadow of Kylo Ren invites in a leer.

"I don't care who you are. What matters is how much you're

worth."

Ah. "And what exactly is the price on my head?"

"What, so you can ditch me and sell yourself? Please. Now, be a good boy and turn around."

Ben draws to his full height. He is not a boy. "No."

"Son," he says, warningly. "Turn around."

Ben doesn't have time for this. He draws his the Force like a tapped mine, reaching for his lightsaber "â€"

Only to find that they are both gone.

What the ACTUAL FUCK.

At his apparent shock, the man who's captured him extends his non-blaster hand. Ice-blue heat shoots out from his lightsaber, in the filthy motherfucker's hand.

Ben clamps his gaping mouth shut decisively. He'll kill him with the Force, then.

As he focuses on ripping the man's head from his neck, he's met with a thick cloud. Sweat bleeds out of his forehead and his chest tightens. His head swims almost drunkenly.

Nothing happens. Something is horribly wrong.

He can't feelâ€|he's deaf, all of a sudden. Why can't he do anything?

Why can't he call for Rey?!

"Force-dampener, boy."

The words dance around his head as if foreign. Ben has heard of these mechanisms before. Usually they're huge pieces of hypo-electric equipment that has to be installed in walls for prisonersâ€|or, in his case as a former Ren Knight, captured Jedi.

Something small and dark scurries on the bounty hunter's shoulder. It's a two-headed, two-tailed lizard with a line of eyes along its spine. Ben's seen pictures of this species before. It's a Ccaleda lizard. It secretes pheromones that heavily dampen most telepaths, including Force-sensitives.

The thing rests on the bounty hunter's shoulder like a pet. Ben's knees wobble, and he finds himself slurring, fighting unconsciousness. "Youuuâ€|"

"Well, you can sit still while I call in â€"

The bounty hunter's teasing sentence is cut off. Rey has snuck up and snatched the damn lizard thing off his shoulder, squeezing its neck until a faint squeak bursts through the poor animal. Hazel eyes blaze, twin death sentences aimed at the bounty hunter.

Her arm snaps back. The lizard is smacked against some empty trash barrels, which clatter in the silent alley. It must be dead because in another moment Ben can finally breathe, and see.

"You touch him again," Rey utters in a deathly voice. "And I'll hurt you."

"Braeton! She's - "

The boy who flirted with Rey comes barreling from behind, only to be savagely kicked in the stomach (Rey doesn't even turn around). He's thrown off-balance and knocks his head against the wall, crumbling to the ground.

Nobody moves. Ben's heart, however, shivers in triumph at her protective rage.

She borders the Dark Side for me.

"Aw, for fuck's sake," says the bounty hunter.

"Give him back his lightsaber," Rey orders.

"So you can cut me to pieces?"

"So we can escape and be on our way," Rey corrects him.

"Though you deserve a lot less," Ben cuts in, sending his lightsaber flying out of the bounty hunter's hand and back to his own.

Still ignited, the blade is pointed at the bounty hunter's heart. Enough of this useless talk and threats.

The Force roars back to him like a tremor. Indignation sings in his veins, bolstering his thirst for punishment. "You will tell me who sent you, and where the closest First Order ship is."

The bounty hunter doesn't even flinch. "'M a changeling, boy. Force Mind Tricks don't work on me. Neither will wiping out my memory." His tone is even yet unbearably smug. "So unless you want me to run back to the Resistance, you're gonna have to spill my guts out here now."

Ben pushes the blade closer without thinking. "That's not a problem."

"Ben."

All she says is his name, and yet it is a stronger restraint in his power than a thousand of those lizard things.

"He mentioned the Resistance," she tells him at his hesitation.

Ben's brows furrow. "I thought the First Order put the price on my head."

"Aye," says the bounty hunter. "But I have a soft spot for the underdogs."

"We're with the Resistance, you clunker," Rey retorts.

"What about the ship that came after us in hyperspace?" Ben cuts in
"Was that you?"

The bounty hunter hesitates, but then there's a sound of rushing footsteps at the end of the alleyway.

It's a Rodian. "Braeton!" he yells in Basic. "You got him?"

Braeton, the bounty hunter, raises his blaster and shoots the Rodian in the chest.

Before Ben and Rey can react from the drawn weapon, another figure skids to his feet in front of the dead Rodian. In mere seconds they watch a human female pull at a communicator and speak to it.

"Shit," hisses the bounty hunter. He shoots again.

The woman dodges and shoots from her own blaster. The bounty hunter and Ben dodge for cover on one side of the wall. Rey, however
â€

Whoosh - "OWWW!"

Ben whips his head around, his throat constricting in fear. Rey is on the ground, scrambling against the wall. She clutches her shoulder feebly while the ground is striped with blood.

REY!

He's temporarily paralyzed from her pain. This is his fault. She's hurt because he was too stupid to protect them both.

I'm all right, she tells him, shaken from the burning impact.

Then the bounty hunter shouts over the blaster fire. "I'll get you two out of here. On one condition: you take us with you."

Burning with lava-hot frustration, Ben steps out and holds out a hand. Every inch of his posture is a command: the next red-hot streaks of laser fire are frozen mid-air.

As the laser bolts crackle, the female shooter on the other end dashes away to escape.

He is so hot with adrenaline he cannot think. They are in danger, and First Order agents could be hovering nearby, or within the Belt. Rey's injured and now the _Falcon_ feels so agonizingly far.

He shifts his focus on the several blasters cutting the air. He aims them at the running woman.

Ben. Let her go.

Ben looks down at his companion, his savior. She's pushing herself upright while still staunching the bleeding.

He helps her straighten her legs with sudden tenderness._ She SHOT you,_ he reminds her in frayed intensity.

Even in the murky moonlight, she glares. "I'll survive."

"Are you people gonna â€" "

Ben cannot think in this cramped, loud space. He wants everything to disappear and have him and Rey back and safe in the Falcon.

But she won't let him kill anyone.

So he does his best with what he's allowed to do. He throws his hand out, and like she did with the lizard and the boy behind them, batters the woman against the wall until she's knocked out.

The bounty hunter watches with an approving nod. "Well, all right, then."

Behind them, the boy groans and shuffles upright. "Whoa. What the fuck did I miss?"

"We've traded our shit comrades for new ones," quips the bounty hunter.

The boy's dazed look is replaced with rippling denial. "What?" He flips his gaze from Rey to Ben. "Absolutely fucking not. We came her to capture him."

"Plans change, boy," the bounty hunter says. "You're welcome to leave, but I've just shot the Rodian and the human. Korla and the Bothan won't be safe without us. Well, me."

Ben grabs the bounty hunter by the collar and leans forward. "How many are there with you?"

"About six more. Aliens that are bigger than me."

"That woman was one of yours?" Rey asks.

"Aye. The rest of the scavengers will probably descend on us in another minute."

The Ccaleda lizardâ€|there could be more of them. Ben shoves the bounty hunter back into the wall to get his attention. "Do they also have Force-dampeners?"

"No! Those shit things are expensive."

Rey's connection to Ben in the Force is torn from her injury. She turns around, remembering the boy. "And what about you? Are you with him?"

Still on the floor, the blond shrugs. "Yeah."

Ben struggles to seize comprehension of the moment. This man is a conflict: First he tries to capture Ben, then he suddenly defends them; though he seems to act out of getting a larger cut on his head-price all for himself.

"So whose side are you on?" he demands, a low growl, baring his teeth. His scar on his face flexes.

"Yours." The bounty hunter replies hurriedly, struggling under Ben's vice grip. "So long as you help me get myâ€|special lady friend and a certain prized possession out of a Grayscale-class ship called the _Shadowbreaker_. I'll help you guys escape. I'll make sure all First-Order-sized cunts are warded off the scent, but me and my assistant here are out of a job, courtesy to you two. So pay up and take us wherever the hell you want with you."

"Are you serious?!" the blond cries out in dismay. He's emanating hatred at Ben.

"Wait â€" wait a minute. Why should we help you?" Rey demands, grimacing away the pain in her arm.

At this, the bounty hunter under Ben's grip turns to Rey, in a patient manner that Ben picks up on immediately.

"Because, luv," he says to Rey, cryptically. "It's about time you returned the favor."

10. Chapter 10

The Call to the Light

Chapter 10 complete

_Five minutes ago: _

The moment Rey sensed Ben was gone, the smell of engine grease and something musky, like nervous sweat, became impossible to ignore.

She was just about to turn the conversation with the boy to the First Order. It was a pretty good set-up, and even though she was trying to get information from him, it felt nice just to talk to someone new for a change.

"Some of those men scare me," the humanoid, Terric, was surprisingly forward with the conversation. "I mean, those Ren knight fellas â€" I heard that they're tortured to within an inch of their lives, and then train when they're bleeding to remind themselves of what pain feels like. It's fucked up, isn't it? Sorry, I'm probably depressing you, but seriously â€" "

"No. No, it's all right, I mean â€" " Rey stumbled, too easily imagining Ben's seeping self-injuries under her hands. "It's justâ€|I've seen footage ofâ€|some of them. But there's one. He was wearing a mask â€" "

"Well, they all wear masks," he told her with a patronizing chuckle as their drinks arrived.

"Right. Well, I mean â€" " she took a deep breath. _Hurry up_. "I mean, I saw one. I was on Takodana. I don't even know how I was conscious, but I saw this red â€" he had this - his lightsaber," she imitated holding one in her fists.

"Yeah, with the messed-up points on the ends. There's footage of

him. "

Rey grimaced. "Kriff. I forgot. He's scary as Vader, isn't he."

"Not really. I think he's trying too hard."

Yikes; Ben would kill this guy if he heard that. Time to start on that drink, now. "Really," she said in forced interest.

"Yeah. Nothing original about him. Although, it looks like even he got bored of his own game. I can't wait to see his face when he's delivered to his mother."

The drink halted on Rey's lips. She froze. "What?"

"Yeah! Some story was leaked on how the top leaders in the Resistance believe he's one of the 'good guys'." He said with exaggerated sarcasm. "Leia Organa had disappeared for about a week and suddenly she returns with this batshit story about how that freak Kylo Ren saved her life. Then she says it's her son, the one that fucking died in the Second Purge. Seriously some fucked-up shit right there," Terric concluded with a long pull of his drink.

Rey swallowed her shock and gained composure. "That sounds absolutely bogus."

"Well, either way, the First Order seems to be treating it as legit," Terric quipped. "Not that it matters, because in any case that monster is on the run. He hasn't been seen in his little campaign footages, and neither is that Jedi the Resistance keeps talking about."

Oh, right. Not that she's ever had to be part of the Resistance's meager campaign spots (compared to the Order's), but her existence has been widely communicated throughout the galaxy. Luckily the Resistance has kept her appearance a secret. As far as she's heard, some don't even know if she's a woman.

"Maybe that Jedi's_ got his hands on him," she joked after a beat of silence.

The way Terric's eyes lingered on her as he lifted his drink made her go cold. "If that's the case, that Jedi's doing a horrible job of keeping an eye on him."

Anyways, that's how she ended up rushing outside, desperate to follow Ben's strained presence with the other bounty hunter.

Sss

Now, bleeding and fighting off nausea and a migraine, she stares at the masked bounty hunter with the muffled voice.

Everything out in the alleyway is cast in indigo and moonlight that she can't see the remains of the other man's face. Ben's molten temper makes Rey lose focus even more. But the smell—the heat from scalding sand, and something else. Musky.

It is a Coruscanti accent. She's heard a few more of those, similar

to her own, since joining the Resistance.

She doesn't know this man. And he's weakened Ben. He could have hurt or killed him out in this alleyway, and Rey wouldn't have known it.

She doesn't want to trust him, or Terric behind her (if that is his real name). But the Force, ever providing and confusing at the same time, is telling her she has to.

She blinks sluggishly at Ben, who's pinned the smaller man. His eyes are wild and dangerous, and she feels something uncurl in her because of it.

He offers only a small nod, having considered her thoughts.

She glares at the blond. "Where's your ship?"

He looks to the masked man for guidance. "Tell us!" Rey spits out urgently.

He glowers in defeat. "Hanger bay five, in a docking station called the Sunset Garage."

"We'll split up. Bria â€" take him to our ship," Ben tells Rey. He comes over and removes her scarf, wrapping it around her shoulder and securing it in tight movements. "We'll meet you there."

Rey hesitates. Normally she'd find a reason to protest, sensing he wanted her out of trouble. But there's a hole in her and it's on _fire_.

"All right."

The bounty hunter shakes his head. "We'll need cover from you guys. Any chance you can bring the ship over to us for a quick escape?"

"Fine," Rey bites out.

Behind her, "Terric" is hauling something from behind a few garbage bins. It looks like a really thin and compact hoverbike. "What about you two?" he asks Ben.

"I can hold my own," he snaps his assurance.

"Ben, wait â€" " Rey pulls him back. "Lightsabers might not be a good idea."

Impatient, Ben glares at her. His last gesture before he parts from her is a hand placed on her hip, on the scarf her own lightsaber hides under.

Then he's off with the masked bounty hunter, the one who is unexplainably familiar.

"You coming or what?" The blonde is already on the bike.

With a huff Rey straddles behind him and holds on with her good arm. "Head for the condemned buildings by the mining

and shouts, "Hey, Vorlo! What happened, everyone out for drinks or something?"

Blaster fire emerges. Ben concentrates on the Force and makes a giant leap, landing on the nose of the ship. He takes out his lightsaber and cuts through the window, stepping through.

There's a Dug waiting for him, cursing and climbing up from the controls to Ben's legs. No longer under anyone's supervision, Ben rounds his saber to cut at any limb hoping to knock him off his feet.

One down.

He steps in and observes the controls for the ramp release. When the metal creaks in protest, he strides out.

A few life-forms are onboard. Swiftly Ben turns through to the main cabin, not even blinking or turning off his saber when the next foe, a Cerean with a vibro-blade, turns to face him.

He briefly registers a gold-skinned woman gasping in terror, and a brown-haired, rodent-faced alien cowering nearby. The Cerean is harder to subdue, but Ben's practiced in deflecting with his saber. He finishes the fight with the Cerean's tall skull lopped off his head.

"Holy shit!" the woman screams.

Ben turns around, wiping blood off the front of his jacket.

He looks between her and the short Bothan, promptly ignoring their unabashed looks of terror. Outside, the bounty hunter must still be dealing with the Barabel and the other Dug.

Instantly he senses their nervousness and suspicion. Force manipulation is a necessity for them at this point. "I am taking you to safety. You will follow me and stay out of harm's way."

Their faces complacent, he leads them to the ramp. The bounty hunter is in the middle of an unmatched knife-fight with the Barabel, and the Dug. Well, nearly unmatched. In each arm is a blade similar to the vibro-blades, and he moves with efficient, quick skill.

We're here.

Ben perks his head up on instinct. It's Rey, though she sounds faint. Soon enough he hears the roar of the _Falcon._

Time's up. He zeroes back on the brawlers, freezing the two aliens' movements.

The bounty hunter's eyes blaze in surprise.

"Leave them! Our ride's here," Ben explains.

Expertly, the _Falcon_ swerves over and neatly hovers above them. Rey holds herself against the frame and holds out her arm.

"Get on the ship!" he yells over the engine to the two

strangers.

His hold over their minds has broken from distraction. The woman screams her protest, finding herself outside. "No way! What the hell's going on!"

"Korla, for cunt's sake, do what he says!" the bounty hunter shouts.

The woman, Korla, looks at the bounty hunter with pleading eyes.

"I'll be right behind you, sweetheart. You too, scruffy," he says to the Bothan.

The two turn to the Falcon, and Ben sends them up in a graceless leap up. Rey pulls them in, though he senses her lapse in strength and wants to get to her, fast.

He looks back at the bounty hunter and his still-frozen opponents. He can smell their distress and primal flight instincts.

He's already killed twice, just after Rey had urged him not to. He lingers on the heinous creatures, hesitating.

"Cut them both up," the bounty hunter tells him. "Trust me. They don't deserve to live."

It is a small relief to hear that. Still, he braces himself against Rey's oncoming reaction. As a trade-off he does so cleanly, quickly; snapping their necks.

With that he pulls on the other man's jacket and lifts them both into the Falcon.

11. Chapter 11

The Call to the Light

Chapter 11

Inside the Falcon, it's a pit of emotions. Ben has to bite down in concentration at the inflamed swirls emanating from the woman, who's so scared she's pissed, the small Bothan and the grudging, irritated bounty hunter.

Rey is barely holding herself up. In the lit-up space, she's pale and sweating.

"Where's the boy?"

"It's all right," Rey pants. "He's at the coâ€¦"

Her eyes, already shining from bearing so much pain, go wide as saucers. She stares at the bounty hunter, who looks back at Rey in a resigned but no less dazed expression. In her mind she's projecting shock, and a trace of anxiety. Ben picks up on it, confirming that the blue-eyed man is familiar to Rey.

The moment is over when the floor underneath them tilts dangerously.

Cockpit, Rey clamors at Ben as she slumps against the wall. Blood is streaked against the surface.

Fuck this day. Fuck this day and fuck this ship.

"Get her patched up!" he bellows as he runs to the cockpit. The Force runs like static where he goes; Rey's had the boy act as a puppet, piloting the _Falcon_ as she helped Force-lift the other passengers inside.

She's going to wake up with a deathly headache, if she hasn't passed out already.

The blonde is halfway out of his seat. "I don't know how I got here, I swear. I don't even know how â€œ"

Sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss

Honestly, Ben doesn't know how he hasn't passed out in frustration yet. Or how he hasn't ripped something apart with his lightsaber.

He had to subdue the blond into unconsciousness before pulling him out of the pilot's chair. Breathing exercises is the only thing that gets him to concentrate on getting into hyperspace.

Once they're safely in the black, he slumps back in the seat. They're lucky the First Order hadn't been there, or found them. He scowls. It's still unclear whether he is wanted by the First Order for defecting, or if the Resistance knows about his defection.

They re-boarded the ship in worse condition than when they disembarked: They have no better sense of direction, no concrete informationâ€”and a total of four passengers.

And they're running low on fuel. Their food rations will deplete faster, too.

Now he's hiding in the cockpit, ashamed that Rey is hurt and he's—he's killed. Just like that. And he wanted to, even felt relieved when someone gave him permission. He hates the lack of control now. Maker. How did his father do it, with his half-cocked plans and escapades? How did his mother?

Patience, he tells himself amidst the cramped, familiar space and the scent of old seat fabric. He is a Jedi now. He'll get answers from his new guests. He'll devise a plan.

Not to mention the fact that this ship has seen its share of accidental adventures.

You are Ben Solo. For once in your life, accept that you are your father's son andâ€¦ get it together.

He needs another minute to run his hands over his face and just laugh.

"Maker. You're Kylo Ren," the Bothan interrupts. "You're the one whose face is all over the holonet."

Ben throws his hands up. "Well, there's our answer. All we had to do is CHECK THE HOLONET!" he bellows.

"You gonna murder all of us now?" the woman demands haughtily.

"Korla," the bounty hunter mutters under his breath. "Shut your trap and sit down before _I _murder you."

Ben turns on his lightsaber, making everyone jump, but thankfully stop talking. He erects a new, fluid mental shield that absorbs his temper in a tranquil shroud.

"I think I will ask the questions now. Starting with you," he demands from the blue-eyed human. "Why exactly did you betray your crew to join us?"

It is no surprise the bounty hunter talks first. "Name's Niall. Niall Breaton. That's Korla. She's not a prostitute, she's a friend. That's Rumley, my main investment," he points to the Bothan, who gives a bored 'hello' gesture. "I'mâ€|not really a bounty hunter, but I am a criminal. Thief, bodyguard, hired killer â€" whatever you want."

Behind Ben, Rey snorts. He _ignores_ it. "You two seemed very eager to capture me," he prompts.

"Aye. There's a lot of new talk going on about you. By the way, what are we supposed to call you? Master Solo, Master Ren, or my Lord?"

"Or mass murderer. Monster," the blond, no longer innocent or petulant, adds. He fixes Ben with an even, cold stare that translates as determined hatred.

Ben surmises the level of distrust wafting from the blond. The woman is drowning in confusion, the Bothan curious but mournful, and the humanâ€|unreadable.

"I no longer call myself Kylo Ren. I defected from the First Order two weeks ago."

"We know," says Niall. "There's been a leaked story from the Resistance. It's all over the Holonet. Apparently Missus Organa, your mum, was recorded telling the bosses of the Resistance that you saved her life and that you had reformed your murderous ways."

This is so utterly unexpected that Ben almost lets his lightsaber reach the floor. Never could he imagine his mother, a cool and unbreakable strategist, give into an emotional decision like this. She must have been fed up with keeping up the secrecy, the lie that he "died" in the Second Purge. Inside, he is a mixture of discomfort at her loyalty, and relief and pride for it.

"Iâ€|I see." He sharpens again. "So if it's a leak, has the Resistance made an official statement?"

"First Order beat them to it: They've kept their announcement private, only for the lowest of criminal circles, but you're worth a hundred million credits, dead or alive."

Ben can only roll his eyes. The First Order would simply shoot the poor bastard who was able to bring him in.

"And I'm assuming that's what you wanted, temporarily," he muses. "There's a higher purpose here. These two " he angles the lightsaber to the blond alien and the blue-eyed man, " " Are here because they are lost, and you care for them. This one," he eyes the Bothan, "I'm less convinced belongs in a circle like yours."

"That's because one of the bounty hunters from the Shadowbreaker had kidnapped and ransomed him. He's not so bad, but I figures, since he's already all the way out here, why not make a deal to get him back home safely, and earn a reward?" Niall grins. "It's honestly no different than a ransom, if you think about it."

Ben ignores the social quip. "So you didn't like your co-workers. As I have recently been in your position, I can sympathize. Now what is it you want from us?"

Niall looks from Rey to Ben. Ben ignores it, for now.

"Where are you folks heading off to?"

Ben keeps his gaze at Niall, but he opens his head to Rey. Rey's mind is so open, radiating honesty, he knows her opinion.

"Jakku. We have business there."

"Jedi business?" the Bothan asks.

"Not any importance to you, but yes," says Ben.

Niall is silent. The woman speaks up, blessedly reasonable. "We're looking for someone. A woman and a man: Lorra Swalvig and Fordo Tangle. They went missing a few months ago and were last seen on a pleasure barge near the Outer Rim. It's a swamp planet, that's all we know."

"Family?" asks Rey for the first time.

They all nod guardedly. When Niall speaks, Ben begins to sense reluctance, and a thin, stretched-out sense of belonging.

"I was tryna get information off the bounty hunters, maybe earn a little extra bribery money. I think they've been sold. Now the law doesn't exist out here. All that matters is that you have what your enemies may want. That's all that you can count on in here. So," he nods at Ben. "You'll forgive me for looking at a walking brooding piece of fortune just waiting to be taken outside. But," he nods to Rey. "Seeing as I know this nice lady, I thought, 'maybe next time, let this one go.' You see what I'm saying?"

Ben hovers the saber at the blond. He will address this particular issue now before he finds himself threatened or betrayed. "You. You've lost someone. Whom do you think I've killed?"

The blond gives an ugly, disgusted look. "How about everyone?! Do I need to have lost someone to hate you?"

It would be so much easier to just peek in there and see the real reason himself. But Ben can't, even as he stares the boy down. Not when he's assaulted people's minds like Rey's and the star Resistance pilot everyone's so fond of.

So he makes his next words sound as much of a threat as possible. "If you'd rather not seek refuge here, I'll drop you off in another day with your memory wiped and having no desire to hunt me down."

Purple eyes gleam in disgust. "You think this good-boy act can fool me?"

"Well, it will eventually â€" not that we care," Rey joins in as she puts her feet on the floor. She's had enough. "You can trust us. We're already trusting you to be on our ship, so fuck off if you don't like it. He won't harm any of us."

Ben feels himself relax and warm at her declaration, until she meekly adds, "â€|Physically. Verbally, probably."

"Oh, yeah, and why's that?" says the blond.

"Because I'm a Jedi too," she huffs, shuffling across the room to her own. She projects over to Ben that she wants him to follow. Sighing, he deactivates his lightsaber and gives everyone a glare demanding good behavior before following her.

Neither Jedi notice the way Niall gapes in bewilderment.

12. Chapter 12

The Call to the Light

Chapter 12

It's been a while since Rey's been hit with a blaster shot. She's glad she's retreated into her room. After seeing him â€" how?!_ â€" she doesn't think she can hold back a few tears and a scream between her teeth.

The man's blue eyes drift in her vision even as Ben comes in. She's slid on the mattress on the floor so that his boots are at eye level.

"Where's the medpac â€" "

"Shelf, over there," she finishes tiredly. "I think I'm still bleeding."

"Don't get shot next time. Are there bacta patches?"

"There's a flexclamp, too, andâ€|irrigation bulb." She waits patiently, concentrating on the blood flow seeping like a well.

Months ago, a lifetime compared to how things are now, Ben had left Rey a few serious wounds. Had she opted to let them scar (which she didn't, she repulsed the idea of visible reminders from him), she would have had a horizontal scar across her collarbone, a misdirected attempt to behead her.

As he kneels in front of her, his fingers warm as they feel around the messy scarf-bandage, Rey struggles not to flinch. He's almost beheaded her. There are others, including a stubbornly-present scar on the back of her thigh, but his face is distinguished more by the thin line she painted on him than any other feature. It's not as evident as when he first burned from it. Stillâ€|

His eyes flick about, almost nervously. She nods, leaning in for him to untie the scarf. He keeps the pressure down.

"Can you heal it?" he asks.

"'M trying. I thinkâ€|" After a while she shakes her head. It's too much right now.

She watches him hesitate over the flexclamp. "I don't think I can heal itâ€|on my own," he admits quietly, getting ready to remove the scarf.

Of course not. Jedi who have fully dedicated themselves to the Light are able to heal, like Rey did for Ben after he had stabbed himself a week ago. Ren Knights are so good at administering pain as part of their training; it didn't occur to Rey that their prized champion might not know how to treat it.

"It's fine. Don't mind the old-fashioned way," she says before gasping, breathing in and out like she is in labor. He slaps on the first bacta patch to staunch the bleeding and sets up extra sterilization tools.

He tosses away the bloody scarf. "This will take you more than a couple of days to heal. You'll have to rest. A lot." Don't leave me with these strange people, he seems to say, his flat tone betraying irritation and confusion.

"They won't kill us or anything."

Ben looks up sharply. "Did you miss the part where that bounty hunter had me at blaster point? He held my lightsaber against me. He had a Force-dampener."

Rey manages to shrug her un-wounded shoulder. "He won't â€" they won't, now thatâ€|justâ€|" she bites her tongue.

"I need more than that," he tells her.

"We can trust him."

"Him?"

She shakes her head. "Them."

"Who is he?"

"I'll tell you when I'm not about to pass out," she reminds him firmly. The second she bites back at him she regrets it. There's really no easy way to explain how she knows the character of that blue-eyed man, the one whose name she never even really knew. Ben wouldn't understand it. At worse, he'd probably kill him, and despise her, never look at her like she was important anymore.

"Guess this was a bad idea," she admits, managing to look at the damage on her clothes. "I really liked this shirt."

Ben tenses at the displeasure ripping at her nerves. "Well, next time, do what I do. Go with black." He undoes the dressing, working quickly with the flex clamp. He's trying, she realizes.

After a moment he tears open a packet of synthflesh. In a few minutes Ben will have to insert it into her wound to expand, so she won't end up with a gaping hole.

"I stole water from him once. I was starving," she begins. "He caught me, and he could have beaten me or killed me, but he didn't. He â€" " she smiles from a memory. "He was the first man with the same accent as mine. And his eyesâ€|they were the first blue eyes I had ever seen in my life. They're like Luke's. I had never seen that before." Her skin is cool, though her face is flushed rosy red.

Ben doesn't like it. He leans forward. "There's something you're not telling me."

Rey rapidly looks away for an answer to be written in the walls. "Iâ€|I can't _tell_ you."

"Show me, then."

"I am definitely not showing you _that_," she snorts.

Ben's heartbeat skips. Her face screams, _you'll hate me, _but he waits out the stare.

Rey relents, swallowing. _Please don't hate me_. "He was being nice the first time. I thought maybe he could give me some of his food or water if I actually proposed giving something back. So Iâ€|traded in aâ€|sexual favor with him."

All at once, Ben feels like he's been punched in the stomach. He actually leans back, having the mind to actually sit down and not rest on his heels anymore. His eyes, so expressive and large, bulge.

This woman is suddenly a different person. Of course she would have had to do undignified things to care for herself, but, for something like this, she's done something thatâ€|he's never done before.

Jedi do notâ€|do that. Not even the wicked ones. It is one of the highest forms of emotional corruption that it would only sully a practitioner's connection to the Force. Ben may have acknowledged that his grandfather, Anakin Skywalker, fathered children, but â€"

"It was consensual," her voice breaks through quietly. "I â€" he was just traveling through. I needed to eat. He had money. It's not like

I ever imagined I'd run into him. _Much_ less with you," she admits.

He's deathly silent. But instead of fuming in rage, like a volcano, heâ€¦it's like he's shattered glass, and he's about to break. He stays horribly still.

"How old were you?"

Rey hesitates. Why is her age so important to him?

"Rey! Maker, were you a child?"

Ohâ€¦That's why. "I was seventeen, I think."

Ben groans and makes an ugly, disgusted face. He actually gets to his feet, which makes everything worse because now she's _physically_ beneath him.

She wants to rip her face off, she's so red. This is what shame feels like. Like when he found out she killed that Twi'lek girl.

"You _were_ a child. He looks like he could be someone's father."

"He _is_ someone's father," she informs him, projecting how unfair his judgment feels to her. "You've never been as desperate as I have. It could have been a lot worse, you know."

This makes him stamp down his shattering ire. Ben shifts on his feet for a bit until he sighs and comes back down. He actually leans in and brushes her hair from her face, kindly. "Did he hurt you."

"No. He..he was gentle. He wasâ€¦he was good. I mean, I didn't complain."

"You didn't know any better," he says automatically, needing to swallow away the trickle of warmth and weakness coming from her.

"I knew enough at that age. I offered, actually."

She offered. She offered _sex_, her own precious body, to a man twice her age, and certainly more unattractive than him.

An idea forms in his head. It's untrustworthy, but it won't go away.

"Iâ€¦I have no reason to ask this. But. Will you show me? Not everything, butâ€¦in between."

This is exactly what Rey was afraid of. He's soâ€¦he has to _know_ everything. He has such an issue with control that it threatens to envelop someone like her, whom he has a delicate, confusing fixation on. She would normally (she _should_) tell him to kriff off, you _sicko_, and get your rocks off somewhere else.

But that'sâ€¦well, she wants to provoke something in him. She is a damned human being. She may still technically be a virgin, but there is a challenge rising in her, to affirm there is nothing wrong with who she is or what she's done.

When she reaches out, Ben suspects he may have made a mistake. He's afraid to see her " and him, the man outside " caught like animals rutting in the shadows.

"Two jugs of water, and twenty portions." Her/his belly's shriveled and lowing. Numbers are all that matter.

A pause. "The cup, too."

After a moment he tosses her/him the cup. "Take it, lass. Go on home. You're too sweet-lookin' for what you're askin' for."

The man has his back to her, leaving her/him to finger the hem of her/his shirt. In a calculated move it comes off, over her/his shoulders.

"Two jugs of water," she/he reminds him, reaching for the drawstring of her trousers. "Twenty portions. Not creditsâ€¦and that shiny, useless cup."

She/he blinks, impressed at how she hasn't run off just yet. "Sit down," she/he commands in a shaky voice.

Ben lets go. He hides, buries, the reaction. He cannot let her know how he feels, seeing her like that. He stares back at the medpac. Small, stubborn, sweet Rey. His Jedi girl, his companion. The day to

his night. Corrupted; come alive through fire and touch.

His jaw is tight from reluctance. What does he say? If only it were perfectly acceptable to walk out of the room right now and leave her.

Still. He's the one taking care of her. Touching her. _She trusts him_. He remembers with pleasure how she came alive, all heat and edge, threatening the ugly man she'd kill him for hurting Ben. It is possessive, and his equally vindictive heart swells from it.

She's sweaty from the wound, the adrenaline that still pulses underneath her skin. The curve of her throat and neck shine from a light above them. Ben follows the rhythm of her heartbeat, drumming steadily underneath her neck.

Meanwhile he feels ugly with his scar and his nose and his too-large body overwhelming hers, even on bended knee.

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

"He _did_ hurt you."

Inwardly Rey disagrees. He " Niall " hadn't meant to, back then. His fingers felt foreign inside her and his nail scratched her rosy flesh underneath, but he had apologized and" kissed her neck.

"No more than you did. At first," Rey points out, nodding her head to his scar. "I did that to your face, remember?"

"He's a rogue."

"I didn't ask for him to be here," she replies, exasperated at his complaints. "He can't frighten you. He may be a free agent, but he's a good man. Trust me."

Against his nature, Ben considers her request. It hardly lasts five seconds before he throws one more grievance.

"He's so unattractive, Rey," he criticizes, trying not to laugh.

It's probably the most unspoken thing floating between them in this ridiculous conversation, but it's enough to make Rey hit the back of her head against the wall.

"Yeah, well," Rey admits as she shakes her head in disapproval. "Although, to be fair, I can do a lot better."

His strong nose is inches from her cheek. She can count the beauty marks on his face. She can even see, from here, the crease-like patterns of his skin along the scar.

Why does he keep it? He could have removed it, surgically. He would have had access to it from the First Order. She hopes Snoke didn't force him to keep it. But would that mean he had kept the scar through his own volition, as proof of his shame, or as a souvenir, a link to some obsession?

She gulps, finding her mouth is very dry. He's the closest to her face sinceâ€|since he held her when she cried over Jess. Only now it's unbearably stark, the light from the overhead lamp bleaching their blank, awaiting expressions.

She's breathing too much. Her breath must smell. Her face must look strange, so close like thisâ€|

His mouth is open. So is hers. He's moving - !

Snap!

"Ahhhh â€" haha!" Rey yelps. The adrenaline of pain strangles her so quickly that she laughs. "Motherâ€|fucker - !"

"Stop swearing. Just because you're in the company of thievesâ€|" Ben quips with a smile pulling at his lips. In his large hand is a vial of synthflesh that he shot into her wound. It expands like a fresh blaster bolt, pushing so much pressure into her that she can't think. Her skin feels like it's burning, like fire is lying in the torn flesh.

In another moment her eyelids flutter, and she feels like she's falling.

"Benâ€|"

"It's all right. I've got you. Rest, Rey," he whispers in her hair. She's out before she can reach out and try to pull on his shirt, to keep him there with her. She was so close, she almost kissed himâ€|.

End
file.